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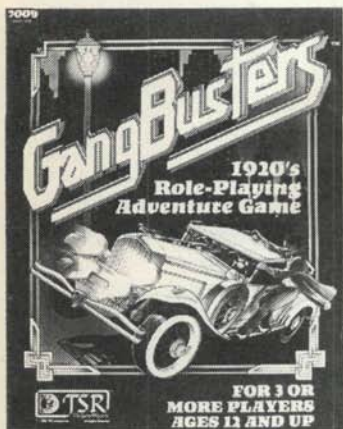
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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

# ELLERY QUEEN

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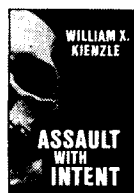
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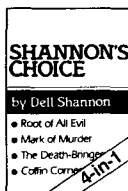
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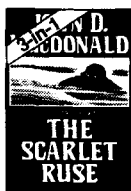
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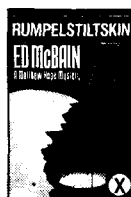
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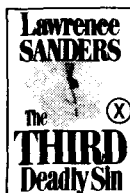
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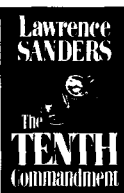


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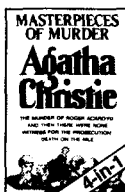
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a **NEW** short story by

**CLARK HOWARD**

*June 1926.*

*For the first time, John thought of himself as an Old Person. If life had gone on as it should have, if the whites had stayed off their land and left them alone, today he would be treated with honor and dignity. Instead of having to clean out a saloon every morning.*

*But soon, he thought, he would make a place for himself in the last tales to be told around Sioux campfires. He would count one more coup—and drive the ghost of Custer from his head.*

*A story about long memories you won't soon forget . . .*

## **CUSTER'S GHOST**

**by CLARK HOWARD**

The old man learned of the anniversary ceremony entirely by accident. One of the previous night's patrons had left a newspaper on the bar, and it was still there when the old man came in early the next morning to clean up. Wiping down the bar, he had picked up the paper to throw it away, but his still quick eyes had caught a glimpse of two words that he recognized beneath a picture on the open page. The picture, of an old man like himself, meant nothing to him, but the two words beneath it had been etched in his mind for fifty years.

Stopping his work, he studied the words carefully to be certain he was not mistaken. He could not read, so he studied each letter, all fourteen of them. They spelled: WENDELL STEWART. When the old man was absolutely sure that the letters and words were the same as he remembered, he carefully folded the newspaper and put

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it in the pocket of his old, worn coat, which he had hung inside the door. Then he resumed his job of cleaning up the saloon.

Three hours later, when his work was done, the old man locked up the saloon, put on his frayed coat, and limped down the little New Mexico town's main street to a combination café-pool hall above which he had a room. He went into the kitchen of the café and showed the newspaper to Elmo, the black fry cook.

"Read this for me, please, Elmo," he said.

"I can't read, John," the black man said without embarrassment. "Ask Stella."

The old man took the newspaper to Stella, the white waitress, who was filing her nails on a stool behind the cash register.

"Will you read this for me, please, Stella?" he asked.

"Sure, John. Which one? This one? Sure." Stella cleared her throat. "It says, 'Ceremony Planned for Fiftieth Anniversary of Custer Battle.' You want me to read the whole story?"

John nodded. "Yes, please."

"Sure. 'A ceremony co-mem-mor-ating the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the defeat and death of General George A. Custer and his Seventh Cavalry has been scheduled for June 25, 1926, at the Custer Battlefield National Monument near Hardin, Montana. Being honored at the ceremony will be former cavalry corporal Wendell Stewart, one of the survivors of A Company, commanded by Major Marcus Reno, which was also nearly annihilated on a ridge three miles away after the Custer massacre. Stewart, one of twenty men who received the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery that day, is believed to be the sole survivor of the Custer regiment. He is seventy-three years old.'" Stella paused and studied the old man to whom she was reading. "Say, John, you must be about the same age as him, aren't you?"

"I am almost seventy summers," John answered.

Stella cracked her chewing gum. "You sure talk funny sometimes, John. Want me to read the rest?"

"No, that is enough. Can you tell me what is the number of today?"

"You mean the date? Sure. This is yesterday's paper, so today must be Thursday, June 16, 1926."

"How many days is it until the day the newspaper speaks of?"

"Well, let's see, that would be—" Stella counted on her fingers "—nine days, not counting today." She tilted her head, raising one eyebrow curiously. "Why? You're not thinking of going up there, are you, John? It's a mighty long way."

"How long a way?"

Stella shrugged. "I don't know. A *long* long way. That's Montana and this here is New Mexico. I can tell you this: we're at the bottom of the map and that's at the top."

Two customers came in and Stella went to wait on them. John folded the newspaper and went back into the kitchen.

"How far is it to Montana?" he asked Elmo.

The fry cook smiled. "Now you asking the right man," he said proudly. "I ain't never learned to read, but, brother, I done hoboed all over this here country, top to bottom and side to side. 'Tween here and Montana you got Colorado and you got Wyoming. I expect you about twelve hundred miles. A good, long piece, my friend."

"Thank you, Elmo," the old man said.

He went out the kitchen door and limped up the back stairs, favoring his right leg. There were three rooms above the café. Elmo lived in one, an old Mexican with a government pension lived in another, and John occupied the third. Because John had dark skin, most people thought he was also Mexican, or at least part Mexican. But he was not.

In his little room, John spread the newspaper on top of a faded old bureau in which he kept his few clothes. From the bottom drawer he removed an odd-looking pouch, shaped like but slightly larger than a saddlebag, from the bottom of which hung what appeared to be, and in fact was, a brown, hairy tail. The pouch itself was also hairy, except in spots where the hair had worn off, leaving a shiny brown skin. It was a buffalo bag, and it was almost as old as John himself.

Opening the flap, John pulled out a faded blue cavalry campaign hat, its brim bent and broken, its crown crushed and lifeless. The old man straightened it out as best he could and placed it upside-down next to the picture in the newspaper. On the inside band of the hat, just barely legible after so many years, were the same fourteen letters and two words that he had found in the newspaper: WENDELL STEWART.

John shifted his eyes to the newspaper and stared at the face above the name. As he did so, he reached down and rubbed the dull, constant pain in his right leg.

So, he thought, the spirits have finally brought you to me.  
After fifty years.

(For many years he had used the name John Walker, but once he

had been Walks-across-Prairies, a young Oglala warrior and a follower of Crazy Horse, his chief. His people had been members of the seven tribes which made up the great Teton Sioux Nation. He had ridden a pony bareback across the vast High Grass, the plain that stretched from the foot of the Black Hills all the way to the Rosebud in the place the bluecoats called Montana.

Child, boy, and young man, he had been a Sioux.)

When the spell of the moment was over, and he no longer stared hypnotically at the photo of Wendell Stewart, the old man reached into his buffalo bag again and drew forth a crudely made but structurally solid and well crafted stone-and-pine hatchet. It was his war club of long ago, and the wood of the pine handle was so old it had petrified nearly as solid as the smooth rock that was its head. He closed his still strong right hand around the handle and held the club diagonally across his chest.

In the cracked mirror above the bureau, he looked at his old, lined face, its skin now similar in texture to the buffalo bag itself. His hair, though still thick, was white like a summer cloud. The line of his mouth had relaxed with the passage of time and no longer served to advise others of the arrogance and defiance that once burned inside him. He knew that much of the fire had gone out of him, but he was pleased to see that his eyes were still clear and alert. The spirits, he thought, always knew what they were doing. His grandfather, Many Leaves, had taught him that when he was a boy living in the tipi of one of his father's wives.

"If the great spirits did not know in which direction to go, they would not move at all," Many Leaves had told him. And added quietly, "Unlike human beings."

It was obvious to John what the spirits now wanted him to do. The picture and the words in the white man's newspaper had been his sign. He was to return to the great battlefield and meet the bluecoat called Wendell Stewart, the soldier who had wounded his right leg with a long, shiny saber and given him his limp.

For fifty years of pain, he was to kill Wendell Stewart.

The next morning when the sun began to rise, John turned his right shoulder toward the light and began walking. His buffalo bag was slung over one shoulder, and he also carried an old carpetbag he had stolen years earlier from a drummer of needles and thread. On his feet he wore his hightop white-man's shoes, but in the buffalo

bag he carried the last pair of moccasins he had made for himself some ten years earlier. When he got to the High Grass, he would put on the moccasins. He walked down the street of the little New Mexico town where he had made his home for more than nine years and, without a backward glance or a regret, began his journey north.

The first day, he passed through towns called Hatch, Arrey, Caballo, and Chuchillo, and by dusk was in a place called Socorro. He did not know addition and subtraction as such, so he had no way of figuring that he had to travel 130 miles in each of the nine days he had in order to arrive at the battlefield on the day of the ceremony. He knew only that it was north and far away, and since the spirits wanted him to get there in time he *would* get there in time.

His leg hurt as he walked, as it always did, but it was advantageous in a way because his limp provided him with many rides. Farmers in wagons gave him lifts, country people driving buggies stopped for him, salesmen in Model T cars took him from town to town so they could have someone to talk to.

"Yessir, I paid three hundred and fifty dollars for this little buggy," one of them said the second day, north of Albuquerque. "Never thought I'd pay that much money for *any* car. But it's worth it. Got a self-starter—don't even have to crank it."

John merely grunted. The cost meant nothing to him. He seldom had more than a little money. Mostly he earned only enough for food, shelter, and clothing. But that had always been enough—his needs were few and simple.

His travel day began at the first hint of sunup. As soon as he was able to tell direction, he was up and moving. During the day he ate berries and other wild fruit—at night he stole corn and melons from the fields when he could and picked up a stray chicken here and there. He would have trapped small game for his meals, but he was in too much of a hurry. Nights he slept in haystacks or woods. The second night it rained and he slept under a country bridge. It had been a long time since he had slept outdoors—it was good to see the stars last thing before going to sleep.

John was pleasantly surprised that he did not dream during his journey. For fifty years, since the long-ago day of the battle, he had dreamed sporadically of Custer. Long Hair, as he had been called by Crazy Horse. Long Hair often came to him in his dreams—buckskin-clad, yellow hair flowing from under the wide-brimmed white-leather hat. In the dreams, Custer would walk directly toward him, eyes fixed, arms swinging slightly, pistols stuck in the belt of his

buckskin coat. He would keep coming, growing larger and larger, seeming bent on trodding over John. Finally he would fill the boundaries of John's mind, become too big for the dream itself, and that was when John would wake up.

John was convinced that his dream image was Custer's ghost, and he hated and feared the dream. As the trip back took him closer and closer to the only place where he had ever seen Long Hair, he had presumed he would be troubled by the dream every night. But he was not, and that made him even more sure of the spirits that had planned his journey.

Even without the dreams, however, he found himself thinking of Custer as he traveled.

(The time of the battle was as fresh in John's mind in 1926 as it had been immediately after it happened, in 1876. There had been 12,000 in their vast camp on the banks of the Little Bighorn back then. Tipis stretched for three miles on both sides of the river. Totanka Yotanka, the great Uncpapa medicine man, whose name translated to Sitting Buffalo, but whom the bluecoats called Sitting Bull, had summoned every tribe on the northern plains to come forward and council with him about the encroachment of the whites onto land that had been ceded to them by the Ft. Laramie Treaty of 1868.

All of South Dakota west of the Missouri River, including the sacred Black Hills and all of the Powder River country of Montana, was supposed to be theirs. It was known as the Great Sioux Reservation and Hunting Ground. There they had lived in peace with all tribes—except the unworthy Crow, of course—for eight years. Then someone had found gold in the Black Hills, and the greedy whites had swarmed in like ants to an anthill. The Sioux had lashed out to protect what the white chief had ceded to them. And the white chief had ordered his bluecoats in to subdue them. When the soldiers began their marches, from faraway places called Omaha and St. Paul, Sitting Bull sent word for all tribes to join him at the Little Bighorn.

For the first time ever, they came together as one people. The Uncpapa, Oglala, Miniconjou, Sans Arc, Blackfoot, Brule, even the austere, high-minded Northern Cheyenne, who considered themselves the Superior Ones. For the first time ever, their leaders, Crazy Horse, Low Dog, Gall, Black Moon, Big Road, Two Moon, and Hump, were all disenchanted with the white man at the same time. Twelve

thousand people gathered to hear Sitting Bull's medicine, and of that number 4,000 were of fighting age.

Walks-across-Prairies had just turned nineteen. Since he had been a boy of eleven, there had been peace with the white-eyes. Walks-across-Prairies had never counted a coup, except among the shiftless Crow, and that certainly was no honor to boast about. When he complained to his grandfather Many Leaves about it, Many Leaves had said, "A worthy enemy is a valuable thing. But no enemy at all is even more valuable. Count coup with the buffalo, my grandson, so that an old man like me might have a new robe before the snows come."

Walks-across-Prairies had taken his grandfather's advice, and for a while he was content with his lot. But when the call came from Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse ordered the camp struck and moved to the Little Bighorn, the young brave felt a new kind of excitement in his breast.

An excitement that meant warpaint.)

On the third day of his journey, John made it into Colorado and was picked up by an oil-truck driver going from Alamosa to Mineral Hot Springs.

"Know anything about this feller Tunney they got matched with the champ?" the man asked.

John shook his head. He did not know what the man was talking about.

"I seen a pitcher of him," the trucker said. "Looks pretty fancy to me. Ain't even got much of a beard. You know, that Dempsey, why, he's got such a rough beard he can draw blood with it."

"This Dem-see, he is a warrior?" John asked.

"I'll say!" the truck driver laughed.

It did not bother John that even after fifty years he knew so little about the ways of the white man's world. He had not tried to learn more than he knew. He felt it was enough that he could now speak the language. Until he was twenty-five, he spoke only Sioux, because after the great battle he had followed Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull into exile in Canada. The great chiefs knew that the white government would not tolerate their great victory over the bluecoats.

"When the white-eyes defeat us, it is a victorious campaign," Many Leaves had said. "But when we defeat them, it is a massacre. The white-eyes are clever with words."

Following the battle, great trails of tribes had moved north into

Saskatchewan. The chiefs knew that the bluecoats could not follow them there—some treaties they would *not* break. They planned to live on the Canadian side and return secretly to the Montana plain to hunt buffalo, which was not plentiful in Canada. But the bluecoats, ever spiteful over the "massacre," put up intense patrols all along the border—in effect, sealing it. They themselves killed buffalo for sport, but would not permit the Indian to kill it for food and hides.

Walks-across-Prairies remained in Canada for six years. For nearly all of the first year he was practically helpless from his severely wounded right leg. The women cared for him until he could walk again. The first time he realized that he would limp the rest of his life, he cried. Then he imagined what Many Leaves, by then dead, would have said. Something like: "A man is not judged by how straight his legs are, but by how straight his heart is." That was the first of many times to come when, to bolster his spirit, he would imagine something his grandfather probably would have said.

A year after the Custer battle, he saw Crazy Horse lead one thousand of his people down to Ft. Robinson, Nebraska, and take them onto the reservation because he could not feed them. Others began to straggle after him—Gall, with his people, then Two Moon, then Low Dog. Finally, after five long years, Sitting Bull led the last forty-three tattered, starving families down to Ft. Buford, Montana, and surrendered.

Walks-across-Prairies remained in Canada another year, living alone, hunting small game to survive, fishing, occasionally making his way north to Moose Jaw to steal necessities such as rifle cartridges and salt to cure meat. When the loneliness began to gnaw at him, he left Saskatchewan and walked into Manitoba. He walked all the way across that province and entered the United States again at Pinecreek, Minnesota. For ten long but uneventful years he wandered mid-America. He crossed to Wisconsin, went over the top of Michigan, down into Indiana, over to Ohio—so far away from the High Grass that at times he thought he was in another world.

Gradually he adopted the white man's dress and began to do white man's work. He toiled in the fields for white farmers, fished off boats on Lake Huron for white fishermen, cut trees in white timber camps, herded milch cows for white dairymen. He was surprised to find that as time went by, the white-eyes regarded him with less and less animosity—and even more surprised to realize that he was beginning to feel the same about them. At all times, for years, he kept

his war club handy, but he never had to hit anyone with it. It was a strange life he led, but he slowly became used to it.

Traveling now on his journey back to the Little Bighorn reminded John of his incredible lifelong pilgrimage around the United States. The little town in New Mexico where he had lived for nine years was the longest he had ever stayed in one place since his wanderings began.

At thirty-five he had been in the Midwest, at forty and forty-five in the Deep South where he learned to pick cotton. At fifty he had been shoveling coal in the engine room of a New Orleans paddleboat up and down the Mississippi. At fifty-five he had been a cook's helper on a cattle drive in Texas. At sixty he worked in the oil fields in Oklahoma, where his employer was a Cherokee millionaire.

A couple of years later he had wandered down into the desert of New Mexico because his bones had begun to ache when it rained or snowed, and he remembered Many Leaves once saying, "After a man passes his sixtieth summer he should look for a warm place to die so that he will not feel the chill of death so strongly." John found his warm place in a little desert community where he got the job cleaning up the saloon in the morning and the café-pool hall at night. For just enough money for food, clothing, and shelter. All a man needed.

When the oil-truck driver let him out in Mineral Hot Springs, John waved and said, "I hope your warrior Dem-see wins his battle." The driver laughed and drove away.

That night, John found a bubbling hot spring outside town and soaked his tired old body in it for three hours. It made him feel strong again. The spirits still knew what they were doing.

On the fourth day, he passed through Poncha Springs, Colorado, walking; Buena Vista, riding a hay wagon; Leadville, on an ore truck; Dowd, walking. Day five took him out of Colorado and into Wyoming. He passed the welcome sign at the state line—he couldn't read it, but he knew he was making progress because for the first time in many years he saw purple prairie clover growing at the edge of fields. He collected some and put it into his buffalo bag to dry. He also found some wild currant flowers that day and picked fifty of their small blue-black berries.

That night, near Saratoga, he trapped a young rabbit, roasted and ate its legs, and stretched the rest of the meat out, crushed the berries all over it, poured fat from the cooked meat of the rabbit on

top of that, and pounded all of it together with a rock. Then he laid it out to dry by his campfire. By morning it would be pemmican, a dry, emergency food much like beef jerky he could carry with him the rest of the trip. Afterward, he steeped the purple prairie clover in water he boiled in a tin cup and made himself some wonderful tea to warm his old bones against the night air.

On the sixth day, he made it to within twenty miles of Casper, and the next morning was given a ride on a Baptist revival bus all the way to Sheridan—more than 150 miles. With half of the day still left, he walked out of Sheridan and by late afternoon came suddenly upon the Tongue River and knew he was in the High Grass country again. Montana.

He made his bed that night on the bank of the Tongue, and for the first time in many years he dreamed not just of Custer, but of Custer's death.

("Today is a good day to fight, and a good day to die," Chief Low Dog told his warriors, who sat on the ground gathered around him the morning of the battle. Walks-across-Prairies stood nearby with Crazy Horse and other Oglalas.

"Low Dog is a fool," Crazy Horse said quietly to his group. "No day is a good day to die, but every day is a good day to fight and live. I think Low Dog has given his brain to the white man's picture box." The Sioux war chief was highly contemptuous of all the Sioux leaders who, for a few worthless trinkets, had allowed themselves to be photographed during the years of the peace. Crazy Horse himself had never permitted a picture to be taken of him. "I want no one to see my face if I cannot see theirs," he gave as his reason.

It was noon that day when Sioux scouts brought them word that Custer's regiment was crossing the plain.

"Long Hair has split his bluecoats into three forks," the leader of the scouts reported. "The captain called Ben-teen has taken one hundred twenty-five men and turned toward the foothills of the Wolf Mountains. They are moving well away from Long Hair. The other captain called Ree-no has taken one hundred forty men and crossed Rosebud Creek. He now moves in the same direction as Long Hair, who has two hundred fifteen men on the other side of the creek."

"How soon will they reach the Little Bighorn River?" Crazy Horse asked.

"When the sun is there," the scout replied, pointing to mid-sky in the west. "By three o'clock."

Gall, who was obnoxious and a braggart, spat on the ground. "Long Hair is a fool," he announced. "He will ride right into our midst."

Crazy Horse, tall and regal, with a single white feather in his hair, grunted quietly. "Long Hair is no fool. A better bluecoat does not live. But his judgment fails him when he chooses scouts. He relies on information given him by the idle-minded, no-account Crow. They are too lazy to scout more than three miles ahead of the bluecoats." He smiled. "We will lie in wait *four* miles ahead. We will lure Ree-no and his soldiers away when they reach the fork of the creek. Then we will meet Long Hair at the Little Bighorn."

And that was the way it happened. A party of forty warriors rode up on Reno's column four miles from the Little Bighorn. Custer ordered Reno to pursue them with full strength. Reno led his 140 men galloping after the forty warriors. The warriors led them three mile across the plain—where one thousand more warriors waited for them behind a knoll. Reno and his men were immediately cut off and driven up onto a bluff where they took cover and dug in.

Custer was now alone with 215 men, riding along one side of the creek that ran into the Little Bighorn. Crazy Horse, at the head of another army of one thousand warriors, waited in a low valley on the other side of the river. When the cavalry column was where Crazy Horse wanted it, the Oglala and his warriors rode up the grassy bank and across the shallow river. Custer and his men were totally, completely—and fatally—surprised.

"No white man or Indian ever fought as bravely as Custer and his men," Oglala chief Low Dog would say in an interview at the Standing Rock Agency five years later, after he had returned from Canada and surrendered. "The white soldiers stood their ground bravely and none of them made any attempt to get away. Our warriors were told not to mutilate the head white chief, for he was a brave warrior and died a brave man, and his remains should be respected."

When all but fifty of his men lay dead around him, Custer ordered his remaining soldiers to follow him to a small hill that formed the highest point on the immediate plain. There the legendary "Last Stand" took place. Crazy Horse's Sioux abandoned their ponies at this point and fought on foot, with rifles and war clubs, swarming up the low hill on all sides.

Walks-across-Prairies had counted six coup on his way up the hill. His bare chest and arms were drenched in his enemy's blood. He saw a white man in civilian clothes take a blow to the back of the

head from a war club and fall dead. He didn't know until later that it was Custer's brother, Boston Custer, who had been traveling with the Seventh Cavalry as a civilian historian. A few minutes later, when there were just a few bluecoats left, perhaps a dozen, he saw a very brave captain standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Long Hair, both of them firing pistols with both hands, until finally a rifle bullet struck him in the throat and he died. That brave captain had been Tom Custer, another brother of Long Hair.

Many historians were to speculate over the decades that followed whether Custer was the last to die that afternoon. Most conclusions were that it was highly unlikely. But unlikely or not, Walks-across-Prairies knew it to be true. Custer lasted the longest that day because his men, who idolized him, fought closely around him, and took the early bullets and blows meant for him. Walks-across-Prairies had been thirty feet from Long Hair when he took the fatal bullets that killed him. It would have been good, he thought later, if Crazy Horse could have been the one to kill him—a chief deserved to die at the hand of another chief—but that was not the way that day. Walks-across-Prairies vividly remembered that Long Hair was killed by two warriors: Mud-between-the-Toes shot him in the right breast, and Two Dogs shot him in the left temple.

After Custer fell, Crazy Horse stood by the body and said, "Long Hair's body is sacred. It shall not be cut."

And it had not been.)

On the last day of his journey, John awoke on a low bluff near a tiny village called Lodge Grass. There was a water hole directly below the bluff, and it was for that reason that John had chosen to sleep there. He knew that in the early morning the buffalo would come to water, and he could watch them. He awoke when he heard the bulls snorting at each other, and splashing as the calves ran playfully into the water.

John sat up and for an hour watched the big, thick, somehow majestic animals as they started their day. There were about thirty of them, including the young—just enough, John remembered, to make a good tipi for winter. It took about twenty dressed hides to make a fifteen-foot tipi, another ten for ground covering and sleeping robes.

Watching them, the old Indian nodded fondly. Then his eyes became sad. Once, he thought, there would have been a hundred or more in the herd that watered here. Now there were thirty. He

sighed a deep, quiet sigh. The buffalo and the Sioux, he thought, have gone the same way. Soon both would be only memories.

When the sun was midway in the morning sky, John prepared for the day. Now that he knew where he was, he knew also how long it would take him to get where he was going. He had about three hours' easy walk across the High Grass. From his buffalo bag, he removed his moccasins and put them on, then packed the rest of his belongings.

Before he left the bluff, he searched for and found a cluster of white Dakota snowberries, and nearby some thriving bloodroot plants. Securing a quantity of each, he put them on separate flat rocks and squeezed the juices from their flowers and roots. When he was finished, he had two small portions of dye, one red and one white.

He wished he could mark his face, but he knew that a painted Indian, even an old one, would have little if any chance of getting past the modern-day bluecoats who guarded the battlefield. So he removed his shirt and streaked only his chest—one horizontal white line across the top, as he would have done his forehead, and three vertical lines drawn down from that, which would have covered his nose and each cheek. It was the Sioux symbol of life, the white line being the tribe, the three red lines being the stages of life: child, warrior, Old Person.

For the first time ever, John thought of himself as an Old Person. If life had gone on as it should have, if the whites had stayed off their land and left them alone, today he would be considered a respected elder, and would be treated with honor and dignity. Instead of having to clean out a saloon every morning.

*But soon, he thought, taking the war club from his bag, he would make a place for himself in the last tales to be told around Sioux campfires. He would count one more coup—and drive the ghost of Custer from his head.*

As he walked toward the half-century-old battlefield that day, John Walker/Walks-across-Prairies thought about the man he would kill.

He knew almost nothing about Wendell Stewart. They had met for only a brief, fleeting instant an hour after the Last Stand. Walks-across-Prairies and some of the other young, eager Oglalas had joined Low Dog in his assault against Major Marcus Reno and the soldiers who had been lured away from Custer. By that time, Captain Frederick Benteen and the contingent Custer had sent toward the

Wolf Mountains had hurried back to reinforce Reno. The young Oglalas who had fought Custer were still fresh—it had taken them only forty-five minutes to win that battle. By then it was only four o'clock on that June afternoon. Still plenty of daylight left for fighting.

It was while Walks-across-Prairies was helping fight Reno and Benteen that a young blond-haired corporal had seized the saber of a fallen officer and slashed the right calf of Walks-across-Prairies as he had ridden through in a pony charge. Walks-across-Prairies had swung at the soldier with his war club, felt it glance off bone, and whipped his pony away with the soldier's hat caught on his war club. They had never seen each other again.

Now, after fifty years, their fight would resume.

By noon, John stood at the edge of the old battlefield where the anniversary ceremony was to take place. There were already a number of people there. They had come in Model T cars, wagons, buggies. John looked around but he didn't see anyone who resembled the newspaper picture of Wendell Stewart. He waited patiently. Under his shirt, the war paint was dry and hard on his chest. In his buffalo bag was the war club.

As he waited, the old man studied the battlefield. There were small marble stones marking where each cavalryman's body had been found. The stones formed a weaving line that snaked its way up the hill. At the top of the hill was a large monument. John walked up and stood beside a schoolboy who was looking at it.

"Is this the grave of Cus-ter?" he asked the boy.

The boy shook his head. "General Custer's not buried here. They took him back to West Point to bury."

John shook his head briefly. That was a sad thing. Long Hair would have wanted to sleep with his soldiers. John had never heard of this "West Point." He hoped it was a place of honor.

"Who lies here?" he asked the boy, touching the monument.

"The last fifty men who died with Custer," the boy said. He pointed to a cluster of markers on one side of the hill. "Those are where the last fifty died. The one at the top there is General Custer's. Just behind his is his brother's, Captain Tom Custer. Right next to that is Captain Myles Keogh. His horse Comanche was the only survivor, man or animal, in this whole battle. 'Cept for Indians, of course. And see that marker 'way down at the bottom? That was General

Custer's other brother, Boston Custer." The boy squinted up at the old Indian. "Anythin' else you want to know?"

John shook his head. "No. Thank you for helping me."

- When the boy left, John walked over to the crest of the hill, to Custer's marker. He could still see him: white buckskin field uniform, wide-brimmed white leather hat, flowing yellow silk scarf, saber on his belt, pistol in each hand, firing down into the wall of Sioux coming up the hill, missing Mud-between-the-Toes and Two Dogs, who raised their rifles simultaneously—

"Ladies and gentlemen," a voice said through a megaphone at the bottom of the hill, "our anniversary ceremony will begin shortly. Will everyone please gather in front of the museum building."

John watched the visitors move in small groups over to the brick building at the edge of the battlefield. His eyes searched the crowd but still did not see Wendell Stewart. Frowning, he made his way back down the rise and walked around the edge of the group, studying faces but recognizing none. Finally he had gone all the way around the crowd and found himself at a side door of the small museum building. There was a young soldier there with a rifle.

"May I help you, sir?" he asked.

John's frown deepened. "Sir" was the title of respect the bluecoats used when addressing their chiefs. Why would this young soldier use it when speaking to him? Perhaps his old ears had played a trick on him.

"I am looking for the old soldier called Wen-dell Stew-art," John said.

"The guest of honor," said the soldier. "He's still inside. Use the front door, right around there."

John nodded. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, sir."

There, he had said it again. This time John was certain of it. The soldier had called him "sir." He had spoken to him with respect.

Still frowning, John went around to the front of the museum and entered. There were a few stragglers still inside, looking at maps and photographs and displays of uniforms and other memorabilia from the great battle. John's eyes swept the faces—and suddenly stopped, locking on the face of Wendell Stewart. The old white soldier was sitting down. A man, woman, and young girl were standing around him, their backs to John. Although it might have been his imagination, John was almost certain that the instant he recognized

Stewart, he felt a sharp surge of pain where the saber had cut the tendons of his right calf.

Fifty years, and the spirits had brought them together again. For the final battle.

John's hand went into the buffalo bag and slipped the war club out. He held it at his side, handle gripped tightly. As he eased toward the small cluster of people, he made up his mind to hit Stewart at the top of the head rather than in the face. A soldier who had lived as long as Stewart had did not deserve to have his face destroyed. I will leave him his dignity and take only his life, John decided.

Slowly, he edged nearer to the man, woman, and young girl, catching only glimpses of the seated Stewart when the people around him shifted their positions. John moved past the back of the man, then the woman, then stepped easily around the young girl to face his old enemy.

And there he stopped.

Wendell Stewart was in a wheelchair. He had no right leg.

Inside John's head, he heard what he imagined Many Leaves would have said: "It is better to have a leg that hurts for fifty years than to have no leg at all."

Wendell Stewart and the three people standing with him all stopped talking and stared at John. Stewart's eyes flicked down to the war club he held. The old white soldier tensed.

Softening, John stepped forward and held the club out to the man in the wheelchair. "I hit you in the head with this a long time ago," he said simply.

Stewart stared harder at him, frowned, then parted his lips incredulously. "And I cut your leg with Lieutenant Gibson's saber."

John nodded. "It has hurt for fifty years." He pulled the old campaign hat out of his bag. "This is yours."

Stewart took the hat and ran his fingers over it. Tears came to his eyes. The young girl knelt and gave him a handkerchief. "Here, Granddad."

"Where did you lose your leg?" John asked.

"On that same bluff with Reno and Benteen," the old soldier replied, wiping his eyes. "About an hour after you and I met. I was a little dizzy from the blow on the head you gave me. I didn't get out of the way fast enough and a Sioux warrior ran a lance through my thigh. By the time we got back to Ft. Lincoln two days later, I had gangrene and the post surgeon had to take it off."

"I am sorry you lost it," John said.

Stewart nodded. "I'm sorry, too, that your leg has hurt for so long."

They were next to a wide window that looked out on the markers, the hill, and the great plain beyond.

"There was room enough for everyone, red *and* white," John said.

"Yes. Yes, there was."

The young girl touched John's arm. "What's your name, sir?"

"Sir" again. John almost smiled, but checked it in time. He must maintain his dignity among these strangers, and smiling was not dignified at his age.

"I am Walks-across-Prairies," he said proudly. "Of the Oglala."

"Would you like to push my grandfather outside for the ceremony?" she asked.

"It would be a great honor."

As the old Sioux pushed the old cavalryman to the gathering outside, he asked quietly, "Do you ever dream about Custer's ghost?"

"No," Stewart replied. "I dream about Crazy Horse's ghost."

Walks-across-Prairies nodded solemnly. The spirits *did* know what they were doing.

"Q"

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## HOW TO REDUCE AN OVERDRAFT

by **WILLIAM BANKIER**

Sarah Kimson finished painting an eyebrow on a pottery mug. Then she said to her husband: "I don't think I like what's in that letter."

"You haven't read it yet," Mort Kimson replied.

"No, but I can read your face."

Mort held the sheet of paper as if it was burning. "Our overdraft stands—no, towers," he corrected himself, "at 894.65 pounds. On an agreed limit of five hundred."

"Are they hostile?"

"The National Westminster is never hostile. But my guess is the manager will soon want us in for another conference."

Sarah looked around her kitchen-cum-studio at dozens of completed plates, cups, saucers, mugs, and bowls. Each piece had a personality (arms, feet, eyes, ears) and today they reflected a mood of desperation. Her cottage industry was a victim of the recession—fewer firms were placing orders for novelty pottery and those who bought were paying late. "We've no way to raise the money," she said. "We may end up selling this place and leaving England. Sarah Kimson predicts."

"We are *never* going back to Vermont," Mort said. "Not with the Siberian winters they've been getting. And our friends waiting to

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pour on the sympathy." When the Kimsons migrated to London four years ago, their group professed disbelief. It was one thing for Mort to commute across the Canadian border and occupy second-horn chair with the Montreal Symphony. But to accept a one-year contract with the London Philharmonic was grasshopper behavior of the third kind. Now, following a cut in the arts-council grant, it was a bad time in England for visiting American horn players. Mort had been made redundant.

"I can't face their smug responses back home," he concluded. "I won't. We must find a way to survive."

"With yon bonnie overdraft?"

"All it needs is money. There must be a way."

Sarah sketched for a while. She always drew with charcoal on textured paper when she was thinking. There was very little distress in her mind. Problems are always shipped complete with solutions. When this one was fully unpacked they would discover the answer in the bottom of the box.

"I should find a job," Mort mumbled.

"There's no work for musicians."

"I mean doing something else. Driving a mini-cab. Pulling pints at the Rose and Crown."

"They pay so little you'd spend it all traveling to and from." Sarah's charcoal swept in broad circles, catching the paper expertly at the places where a jowly masculine face lay concealed. When the portrait was finished, she turned the pad toward her husband.

"Keith!" He grinned at the likeness. "Good old brother Keith." Then his wife's meaning came through to him. "Forget it. He'd never lend us the money."

"I don't mean *lend*, I mean give. And why not?" Sarah slapped the pad down with righteous dignity. "It's like asking the man who owns the beach if he'll let us take a handful of sand."

Mort's brother Keith had done well, and all on his own. When school ended he took a job in the shipping department of an advertising agency. At night, he attended courses in marketing and print-production. Two years later the agency had a vacancy for a trainee account executive and Keith filled it. Within three more years he was handling his own accounts. He might have ended up running the shop had he not been lured away by one of the agency's clients, a leading distiller. Now, at thirty-four years of age, Keith Kimson occupied an important managerial post in a golden tower in the heart of the busy city.

"I suppose he's got the money," Mort conceded.

"Three vacations a year? Two hideous cars and one cute one?" Sarah cited the evidence of Keith's affluence like proof of crimes. "He could bail us out with what he spends on his son's ski equipment alone."

"Still—" Mort had no comeback apart from a stubborn feeling rooted in ancient grievance. Many years ago, first brother to leave the small town and move to the city, he had written home to ask Keith to lend him thirty dollars. Even then, the younger brother was working after school and saving most of what he earned. A money order arrived but with a note attached: "Don't you think you should study your budget? Isn't it possible you're living beyond your means?"

It was painful for Mort then, and it would be now, to have his brother advise him on how to conduct his affairs.

"Still what?" Sarah interpreted her husband's silence correctly. His brother's success made it difficult for Mort to deal with him. She would have to bring him forward a step at a time. "Never mind, I know what's bothering you. Keith believes every man should earn his own. He thinks if he gives you money it will destroy your initiative, turn you into a lotus eater."

"Something like that. I'm not going to give him the chance to turn me down."

"Then don't. Use some of that initiative he's always preaching about."

"I'm not with you."

"Let's think of some way to make him say yes."

Mort Kimson was quiet for half a minute. "You mean con him. Get him to send the money under some false pretense."

Sarah beamed. "That was the hard part. I knew you'd make it."

For the next couple of days her husband needed frequent reassurance. Sarah provided it by reminding him of times when the shoe had been on the other foot. "Remember when young Lewis was sent to you for tuition in music theory?" For six weeks, Mort had worked with Keith's son almost every night. The boy failed the exam anyway but that was because he was a bad piano player. His mark in theory was above average. "How much did you charge Keith for the lessons?"

"Lewis is a good kid." Mort smiled fondly. "Remember when he came through on his way to Garmisch? We had a nice visit."

"And what about Keith's first apartment in the city," Sarah continued, "before they moved on to U.N. Plaza. I chose the paint, I picked out the wallpaper. I even donated fabric I wove myself to be made up into curtains."

"They had us to dinner and thanked you most sincerely," Mort said.

"Then that's the answer." Sarah strode out of the kitchen. "We'll thank the bank most sincerely," she called, "and they'll write off our overdraft."

For days the Kimsons ate pasta and drank lemonade. But even the most primitive standard of living cannot prevent the steady outward flow of money. The mortgage payment came due. So did the property-tax payment. The telephone bill had to be paid as did gas and electricity. The meter at National Westminster registered a further increase—the manager wrote again suggesting the dreaded meeting.

"Take your choice," Sarah said as she chopped parsley from her garden to garnish the macaroni-cheesebake. "Confront your brother or the bank."

Mort came as close to anger as he ever did with this slim dark girl who had been the core of his life for twenty-five years. "I *can't* ask Keith for money. You don't understand. He'll probably say no. In any case, he'll lecture me and I'll never get the sound of his voice out of my mind."

"You're the one who doesn't understand. Pay attention. He needn't know what the money is for. We'll let him believe he's helping himself."

"I'm not with you."

"Yes you are, every step of the way. Now listen. London is famous for its bookshops—Charing Cross Road is full of them. So here's what we'll do."

The idea had come to Sarah as she recalled examining Keith Kimson's bookshelves in that first redecorated apartment many years ago. Her brother-in-law had been an unknown quantity to her then. Ah, she'd thought as she saw the rows of glossy covers on either side of the fireplace, here's my chance to learn something about Keith. You can understand a man by discovering what he reads. Zola? Turgenev? Roth? Mark Twain?

She carried her whisky to the shelves for a sip and a browse. Within one minute she was sitting down again as far away across

the room as she could get. *The Hidden Persuaders. How To Win Friends and Influence People. Making the Most of Your Personality. Effective Speech-Making.* The self-improvement titles followed one after the other—her husband's brother read only those books that would increase his capacity for making money.

This pathetic discovery came back to Sarah Kimson now in her time of need and, with it, a preposterous idea for separating the affluent businessman from a couple of thousand of his much-loved dollars. Having heard his wife out, Mort Kimson produced a defeatist response. "It'll never work."

Sarah believed it would. It was a huge lie and history showed that the whoppers were the ones that people swallowed. "What can it cost us?" she countered. "A little time and an airmail stamp."

They composed the letter together. It began as follows:

Dear Keith:

I couldn't help thinking of you yesterday when I was in a fabulous bookshop off Tottenham Court Road. It specializes in useful non-fiction—you would have gone wild. I've listed some few titles you will want to have.

*Moments into Money*—Lefko Dulmage, £17.50

*Inventory, Eskimos & Iceboxes*—Seebold Dunn, £14.50

*God Is a Marketing Man*—Avery Thomas, £12.95

*Thousands Every Minute*—Barnum Belasco, £8.75

*Enhance Your Personal Magnetism*—Farley Dean, £12.00

*The Telephone As Sellaphone*—Connor & Hull, £17.00

*Making Words Work Overtime*—D. H. Lorenz, £14.50

The bibliography covered two typewritten pages. Sarah and Mort spent a hilarious afternoon inventing the titles and drinking stout. The cost for ordering the lot came to just over a thousand pounds.

I recommend you order them all, Keith, (the letter went on) because the shop owner told me many of these titles are going out of print. If you can let me have your certified check by return mail, I will close the deal and make arrangements to ship them to you.

I know it seems a lot of money for books. But you will agree, I am sure, that each one will repay its cost many times over in personality enrichment and business enhancement.

They posted the letter together and then caught a bus to Kew

Gardens, where the Temperate Pavilion had just been reopened after a major refurbishing. "Is it possible he'll go for it?" Mort wondered.

"My guess is he will," Sarah said. "Anyway, we're putting up a fight. We're not just lying down and letting life walk all over us."

Keith Kimson's response arrived within the week. It was brief and businesslike and it included a certified check for two thousand American dollars.

Dear Mort:

Nice work. Those titles sound interesting with one exception. Delete *First Dollar, First Love* by J. Marley. Please complete purchase and ship soonest. Enclosed check should convert into sufficient Sterling to cover costs and leave a finder's fee for yourself. Best to Sarah—

brother Keith

"I can't believe it," Mort said, pocketing the letter. "We've killed our overdraft."

Sarah took a deposit slip from the back of her checkbook and began filling it out. "And our luck is going to turn," she said, "wait and see. Happy Home Stores wants to see me about my new line of ceramic breadboxes."

With the check in the bank, the Kimsons were able to relax for the first time in months. But not for long. "The fact is," Mort said, facing reality, "we now have to deliver. We've taken Keith's money. What about his books?"

"No problem," Sarah said. "All it will cost us is another postage stamp."

"I'm listening."

"We've begun lying and it's working. Let's keep it up and make it big." She considered the situation while her husband turned the pages of *New Musical Express*. When she spoke at last she puzzled him once again. "Isn't it sad about the fire?"

"What fire?"

"When the oil in the chip pan ignited and you ran to carry the pan outside and it spilled over the packing case of books and they went up in flames."

Mort's eyes slipped out of focus. He spoke as if under hypnosis. "And the fire department came and hosed everything down and the books are all charred and waterlogged."

"You've got it," Sarah confirmed. "It's going to take us weeks to

redecorate the kitchen. And we're awfully sorry but the books are beyond salvage."

"Worse still," Mort added, "I've checked with the shop and the entire inventory has been sold out."

"In fact, they've gone out of business," Sarah concluded. "The place is now Adult Films, Bondage and Latex Bikinis."

Mort took up one of Sarah's pens and drew a circle around a small ad in the musicians' newspaper. "You're right about our change of luck," he said. "Here's somebody needs a horn player."

They composed the follow-up letter two days later. Before he sealed the envelope, Mort had an afterthought. "I have to do this," he said, writing a check to Keith Kimson in the amount of twenty pounds. He tucked it into the envelope, then scribbled a postscript to the letter while Sarah nodded approval.

P.S. I am enclosing my personal check to cover the finder's fee you sent me. As you will appreciate, Keith, I can't take money from my own brother.

As ever, the British castaways,

Mort and Sarah

"Q"

## DETECTIVERSE

### *BETTER NEVER THAN LATE*

*by M. EDWARD HOLDEN*

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a **NEW Black Widowers** story by

**ISAAC ASIMOV**

*Another challenging evening with the irascibly inclined Black Widowers, who respond to their handsome young guest's problem—a problem involving linguistics, morality, and, quote, love, unquote—with tactful solicitude. Which just goes to show once again that irascibility, as well as beauty, is often only skin-deep . . .*

**A MONDAY IN APRIL**

by **ISAAC ASIMOV**

Charles Soskind was strikingly handsome. That much was obvious from the moment Thomas Trumbull introduced him to the membership of the Black Widowers on the occasion of their monthly banquet.

It was, in fact, obvious even before he was introduced. He was tall, slim, dark-haired. He had a pale complexion with eyes that were all the more startlingly dark for that. He had astonishingly regular features, firm lips with just a trace of sensuousness about them, and an engaging smile. He shook hands with a strong grip and his fingernails were well cared for. He exuded just a trace of after-shave lotion and the paleness of his cheeks was shadowed by the blueness of a buried beard. He was well barbered and he seemed like a throwback to a Gibson collar-ad.

Trumbull said, "Charles is relatively new at the department. He took his degree in Slavic studies at the University of Michigan."

Hands were shaken all around and each Black Widower displayed that quite detectable air of distrust with which ordinary males meet an extraordinary specimen of their own kind.

Mario Gonzalo was perhaps most obvious in his reaction. He man-

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aged to locate his reflection in the mirror and refurbished the line of his jacket in what he might have thought was an unobtrusive manner.

If so, Emmanuel Rubin promptly disabused him. With a broad grin which showed the pronounced gap between his upper first incisors, Rubin whispered, "Forget it, Mario. You're straight out of the garbage can in comparison."

Gonzalo lifted his eyebrows and stared down at the shorter Rubin in haughty displeasure. "What the hell are you talking about?"

Rubin continued to smile. "You know," he said, "and I know, and surely that's enough."

Just the same, Rubin did manage to run his fingers absently through his straggly beard as though a sudden and impossible desire to have it flow downward in a neat and impressive manner had overtaken him.

Geoffrey Avalon cleared his throat and stood straighter and more stiffly than was his usual wont. He was two inches taller than Soskind, and it was clear that he didn't care if the whole world noticed that little fact.

Roger Halsted sucked in his stomach and endured the discomfort of that for nearly two minutes. James Drake, the oldest of the Black Widowers, looked preternaturally indifferent, as though it was only age and nothing more that kept him out of the race—and, what's more, prevented him from winning.

Only Henry, the competent waiter on whose shoulders the welfare of the banquets rested, seemed truly unaware of anything out of the ordinary as he brought Soskind his straight ginger ale, with a maraschino cherry in it.

Soskind regarded the drink somberly and then, with the air of someone who has survived questioning on the matter for years, said, even though no one asked, "I order the cherry because that makes it look like an alcoholic drink and I don't have to explain why I'm not drinking."

"Why don't you drink?" asked Rubin, with immediate perversity.

"It's not because I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous," said Soskind drily. "I just have a low tolerance for alcohol. One drink gets me distinctly high, and since I get no pleasure out of the sensation, I choose not to drink."

"If I were you," said Gonzalo darkly, "I'd get Perrier with a pearl onion in it. That dye they use in maraschino cherries is carcinogenic, I hear."

"So is everything," said Soskind, "if you choose the proper strain of rats to experiment with, and make the doses large enough."

Halsted said, with the usual slight stammer that always seemed to invade his speech as soon as he tried particularly hard to seem a man of the world, "Too bad you're so adversely affected by alcohol. Overdoing it is bestial, but there's nothing quite as civilized as the ritual of the moderate sharing of drinks. It reduces the inhibitions standing in the way of the true grace of social intercourse."

"Believe me," said Soskind, nodding, "I fully appreciate that particular disadvantage under which I labor. I usually avoid cocktail parties simply because I can't participate on equal terms. And that's by no means the worst of it. It's the business lunches that are the real strain. I assure you that if I could drink more easily, I would be glad to do so."

And almost at once, as though on cue, Henry announced the end of the cocktail hour. "Dinner is served, gentlemen."

Drake found himself sitting next to the banquet guest and said, "Are you of Russian extraction, Mr. Soskind?"

"Not as far as I know," said Soskind, his expression lightening a bit at the smoked salmon and onion bits. He reached for a section of the thin-sliced bread and butter and carefully brushed the capers to one side. "My father's father arrived here from Luxemburg, and my mother's parents were both Welsh."

"I asked," said Drake, "because of your degree in Slavic studies. Your doctorate, by the way?"

"Yes, I have the right to be referred to as Dr. Soskind, though I never insist on it. You are Dr. Drake, I presume?"

"Chemistry. But all of us can refer to each other as doctors by virtue of our membership in the club. Even our good Henry, the invaluable waiter of the organization, is Dr. Jackson, if we choose to call him that. —But how did you come to Slavic studies?"

"Oh, that! No personal reasons, if you discount ambition. After all, the United States has been facing the Soviet Union in open competition for forty years now. Many Soviet citizens can speak English and have studied Anglo-American history and culture, while very few Americans have returned the compliment. This puts us under a severe disadvantage, and by making a personal effort to help redress the balance, I am making myself a patriot and, in addition, am opening my way to advancement, since my knowledge is useful."

"You mean in Tom Trumbull's department?"

"I mean," said Soskind carefully, "in that organ of government in which we both serve."

"I take it then," put in Avalon suddenly from the other side of the table, "that you speak and read Russian fluently."

"Yes, sir," said Soskind, "quite fluently, and Polish as well. I can make myself understood in Czech and Serbian. With time, I hope to learn other languages, too. Arabic and Japanese are extremely important in today's world, and I intend to take courses in each as soon as I finish my present damned task."

Trumbull leaned forward from his position at the head of the table, which he occupied by virtue of serving as that evening's host of the banquet. "Stop it, you idiots! Is this grilling-time? Charles, you answer no questions at all until it's time. Right now, you just enjoy your dinner undisturbed. —I don't understand you half-wits. Do the rules of the club have to be explained to you each time?"

"There are no rules," said Rubin promptly.

"Yes?" said Gonzalo. "I wonder if you'll expound that doctrine the next time I bring in a woman as my guest."

"That's a matter of *tradition*," howled Rubin. "If you can't understand the difference between tradition and rules—"

And the discussion degenerated into a verbal free-for-all at once.

The bouillabaisse was done; the hot, scented napkins had been put to their proper use; the baked Alaska was consumed; and the Black Widowers were lingering over their coffee (tea for the guest) when Trumbull rattled the spoon against the water glass and said, "Mario, since you did not display the bad taste to grill my guest before he had been adequately fed, won't you now serve as griller-in-chief?"

Gonzalo jumped slightly. He had produced the needed caricature of the guest, catching him in a spectacularly Byronic profile. He said, "Mr. Soskind, it is customary to begin by asking the guest to justify his existence. Let me answer that question for myself. I judge that you would say in response that you are carrying through the justification by using your Russian to help the American government beat the Soviet Union."

Soskind, who was glaring at the caricature, said, "The word 'beat' has unpleasant connotations. I would prefer to say that I am doing my bit to secure the interests of the United States, which, I take it,

means first and foremost the preservation of world peace and the protection of human rights."

Gonzalo said, "But wouldn't you be making a hell of a lot more money if you went into show business?"

Soskind reddened and seemed to be struggling with himself to prevent an explosion. His control burst, however, and he said, "That's an idiotic question to ask, and the proper answer I ought to give you is a punch in the jaw."

For a moment, the gathering froze and then Trumbull said, with totally uncharacteristic mildness, "That's uncalled-for, Charles. I told you the way in which we play our game when I invited you to dinner. I don't deny that Mario is often idiotic, as are we all—always excluding our good Henry—but he was in this case within his rights. He was asking a question, and he may ask any question. You have been given to understand that you must answer all questions truthfully. Whatever you say will never pass outside this room."

Soskind said, "Of course, Tom. I apologize to you, Mr. Gonzalo, and to all the company." He drew a deep breath and said, not without some signs of continuing anger, "I suppose it might look to some people as though I might be successful in Hollywood, especially if I really looked like that sketch you have drawn, Mr. Gonzalo. I suppose you meant it to represent me but I earnestly hope I don't resemble it altogether."

"Good looks, assuming I have them, might get me into the movies, but I doubt they could make me a success unless I had some minimal acting ability as well—something I do not have. Even then, it could not make me happy unless I had the actor's temperament, which I am poles removed from. I'm doing what I want to do—studying the languages of humanity—for the reasons I have mentioned, and if it returns an adequate compensation, I'm quite ready to dismiss dreams of avarice. Have I made that clear?"

"Very clear," said Gonzalo. "But what makes you think you lack the temperament of an actor? I know a number of actors and they come in all shapes and varieties of temperament. As for acting ability, it seems to me you have the capacity for—histrionics, if Manny will tell me that is indeed the word I want."

"That's the word you want—for once," said Rubin.

Soskind bowed his head for a moment. When he lifted it, it was as though the clouds had thinned and the sun had broken through. His smile was all but irresistible.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I find that I'm still making things hard

for you. I don't wish to do that. Honestly! It's just that these last ten days or so I haven't been myself. I assure you that ordinarily I'm not given to histrionics—"

Several of the Black Widowers spoke at once and Trumbull's voice rose piercingly. "Mario has the floor!"

"Thank you, Tom," said Gonzalo, and at once asked what all the others had been trying to ask. "Why are you not yourself? —And please don't say that it's private or it's none of my business. It's my question and I want an answer."

"I understand," said Soskind calmly. "But I'm afraid it's an old, dull story. A young lady with whom I was—am—oh, hell, if you don't mind my sounding like a romantic jackass, always may be in love—betrayed me and—and— Well, what more is there to say?"

"Did she run off with your best friend?" asked Gonzalo.

Soskind looked revolted. "Of course not. Nothing like that! She's not that kind of woman."

"Well, then, what happened?" asked Gonzalo.

Avalon's baritone voice boomed out. "Wait! Before you answer, Mr. Soskind—and with your permission, Mario—please tell me if there is any mystery to this."

"Mystery?" Soskind looked nonplussed.

"Yes. Anything you don't understand; anything that puzzles you and that can't be explained."

Soskind said, "Not at all. I wish there were. It's all very plain and, well, heartbreaking. Claire broke her word, that's all. She took an unfair advantage and didn't even have the decency to be ashamed of it. I couldn't live with that no matter how much I might be in love with her."

"No mystery," said Avalon, smiling. "You might want to let the matter drop then, Mario. Why probe a sore subject just for the sake of probing it?"

"Thank you," said Soskind.

Gonzalo frowned. "Unless Tom makes a host's decision against me, Geoff, I *won't* drop the subject. I'm curious."

Trumbull hesitated. "I'll poll the company. How many want the subject dropped?"

He and Avalon raised their hands, and Trumbull said, "Four to two against dropping the subject. Henry—are you voting?"

Henry, who was just adding a drop of brandy to Drake's glass, said, "Yes, sir. My hand was not raised. I feel that if Mr. Soskind

still feels an affection for the young lady, he may have a suspicion that he is misjudging her. It might help if he tells us the details."

Rubin said, "I was pretty much thinking the same thing," and now there was a murmur of agreement about the table.

Soskind looked from face to face and said, "All right, I'll tell you—but you'll find there's simply no doubt about the matter. I have no suspicion that I'm misjudging her."

You know [said Soskind], it's particularly hard for me to find a young woman I can be interested in. Please don't make mock faces of disbelief. I do attract female attention because, I suppose, of my—my appearance—as I would if I were ostentatiously wealthy, or if I were a rock-star. But of what value is attention for superficial reasons such as those?

Being human, I sometimes take advantage of such attention, particularly if I'm lured into thinking it's something more than a matter of superficial appearance that attracts the woman—or if I, in turn, am attracted by something or other that's really of no importance. I am, in that case, quickly disillusioned, gentlemen—and so, it may be, are they. —On the other hand, my appearance is often against me and actually repels young women—and you needn't make exaggerated expressions of disbelief at that, Mr. Gonzalo. There are many women who come to an instant misjudgment concerning me through no fault of my own.

I've heard the comments indirectly. "Who wants a boy friend prettier than I am?" "I'll have to fight for a chance at the mirror." —The feeling is universal that if a man is, quote, good-looking, unquote, as I was accused of being by this assemblage, at least by implication, then he must be vain, self-centered, capricious, and, worst of all, a brainless fool.

As it happens, I'm a serious person. I don't mean by that that I lack a sense of humor or that I don't laugh or that I don't occasionally enjoy being silly. The point lies in the use of the word "occasionally." For the most part, I'm interested in straightforward application of nose to grindstone, of myself to my career and to my intellectual interests. And I want my women serious, too.

But the women most likely to interest me—the intelligent, serious, ambitious ones—they are the very ones most likely to be put off by me, the very ones who will quickly decide that I am an obnoxious nonentity. That I am, quote, too pretty, unquote.

Which brings me to Claire.

Like me, she is a linguist, specializing in the modern Romance languages as I specialize in the Slavic.

She's quite good-looking—at least I find her so—and indifferent to that fact. She's serious, intelligent, hard-driving—a feminist in fact rather than in conversation, having driven her way forward, and without much fuss, in a man's world.

It wasn't love at first sight. What can one possibly know at first sight but superficialities—and very likely deceiving ones, at that? We met at the library when we were each engaged in a little research and discovered we had interests in common. I was at the department, she at Columbia.

We met again, and then it became periodic. The more we learned about each other, the more satisfied we became. It turned out we had the same general opinions in politics, literature, and art—with enough differences in detail to lead to interesting discussions.

The thing I most approved about her was that where there *was* a disagreement she expressed her point of view calmly and with cogent arguments, and considered my counter-arguments dispassionately and thoughtfully. There were times when she accepted my point of view, and times when I accepted hers, though on most occasions, I must admit, we continued to disagree. I couldn't argue her into voting Republican, for instance.

In the end I was in love—by which I don't mean I was overcome by a mooning longing for physical intimacy. That existed, of course, but I was in love with her because I desperately wanted a continuing and lifelong companionship with her, where we could pursue our own aims and interests with the interest and support of each other.

We talked of marriage and of children. There were what I might term romantic interludes—neither of us were entirely creatures of the mind. Then, one day, it turned out that neither of us had really studied Latin.

"We ought to," said Claire, "if for no other reason than the mental stimulation. Besides, it would please Professor Trent."

I must tell you about Marcus Quintus Trent. He was a Latinist of the old school (and so was his father—hence his name) and he had an emeritus status at Columbia. He'd been a friend of Claire's father and had been instrumental in interesting her in languages. I met him and found him genial and interesting. He had the manners of a gentleman, in the non-American meaning of that word.

His Latinism, however, led him to believe, it sometimes seemed, that he was living in Julius Caesar's time. He was not only Latinate

in his way of speaking, but in his way of thinking as well. It seemed an effort for him not to refer to the American President as the Emperor. He would use Latin terms without being aware of it and was as likely to date a letter in the month of Februarius as not. I suspect he was a bit woebegone over Claire's having studied all the direct descendants of Latin, even a bit of Catalan and Rumanian, without actually dealing with Latin itself. That may have led to her decision to study it.

Automatically, I decided to go along with her. And thus began what I referred to earlier in the evening as my, quote, present damned task, unquote.

I don't use the adjective to indicate that the task is difficult. Learning Latin isn't the major task a non-linguist might assume. For me, the case-structure of Russian was excellent training for the actually rather simpler case-structure of Latin. For Claire, the Latin vocabulary was no problem at all since it was first cousin to Italian, which she spoke like a native. And for both of us there was a native talent for languages, to say nothing of considerable practice in learning them. No, the task is a "damned" one for something that has nothing to do with the language itself.

We discussed, with considerable animation, the matter of who would have the final advantage—I with my grammatical headstart or she with her vocabularial push forward. We didn't conjecture as to which of us might be the better linguist in general.

Yes, Mr. Rubin, I quite realize that setting up a competition between two ambitious, hard-driving people might well endanger the affection that had grown up between them. But while neither of us would have liked being beaten, we both agreed that our love was strong enough to survive the fact that one of us was bound to be beaten by the other.

Besides, what is a single defeat? If one of us was a clear loser at this challenge, the other would likely win out on another. The keen edge of intellect, sharpened by the competition, might, in fact, serve to advance each of us in our profession, and this would more than make up for any trivial score of victories and defeats.

At least, we persuaded each other that this was so.

The idea was that we were each, quite independently, to study Latin on our own, using texts and authors of our choice. After six months, Trent would give us a passage of Latin literature to translate and he would judge it on the basis of both accuracy and eloquence of translation. In other words, a word-for-word translation was not

enough. Trent intended to look for English that would capture the style as well as the meaning.

Trent threw himself into the matter with vigor. He chose Cicero as a matter of course since Cicero's Latin is the most elegant in existence and also the most gracefully convoluted. He urged us to read Milton's *Paradise Lost* if we wanted the nearest equivalent in English to Ciceronian style, and to be guided by that.

He chose a passage from one of Cicero's lesser essays, one which was likely to be unfamiliar to us, and handed a copy to each of us in a sealed envelope. The terms were that we were both to open the envelope at 9:00 A.M. on the fifteenth of April and hand the translation to him no more than a week later—ample time not only for translation, but for polishing and repolishing for style.

In translating we might use a Latin dictionary but, of course, we were neither of us to search for any already existing translation of the passage. We agreed to this readily, and Trent trusted that we would both adhere to all conditions in all honor. As for myself, I knew he wouldn't find me wanting and I assumed he wouldn't find Claire wanting either. It didn't even occur to me that Claire could possibly cheat.

The final condition was that Trent would be sole judge of the results and that his decision was to be accepted without argument.

Claire and I agreed that we would remain completely apart for the testing period, lest the presence of one prove a distraction to the other. In fact, I had to go out of town on Friday, the tenth of April, and was gone for the weekend. I didn't see her from the tenth until after our translations were handed in.

I remember Trent chuckling over the result. He said we were twin souls indeed, for our translations were so remarkably similar that he could scarcely believe they were independently done. He judged Claire's the superior for reasons he outlined, but by a margin so small that I could scarcely consider it a defeat. I *swear* I held no animosity against Claire for winning. I was proud of her.

I was human enough to regret one thing. I had opened the sealed passage promptly at 9:00 A.M. on Wednesday, April fifteenth. Actually, I opened it five minutes after the hour in an exaggerated effort to lean over backward not to break the spirit of the agreement, just in case my watch was a little fast.

But then, I had not taken the full time. We were allowed seven days, but I took only four. It was a bit of vainglory on my part, I think, but by that time I had, in any case, grown tired of going over

and over the passage and worrying endlessly over whether to say "of Time's great sway," or "of Time's mighty hest." So I just handed it in on the evening of Sunday, the nineteenth.

Later, of course, I thought that if I'd spent three additional days improving my translation it would have added just that extra bit that would have put me first. Claire told me she had handed in her translation on the afternoon of Monday the twentieth, so she had had nearly a whole extra day. But then, if I had put in the extra time I might simply have damaged the translation through over-much patching and repatching.

I treated Claire to a late-evening champagne celebration, and we got along marvelously well. After all, we hadn't seen each other for nearly two weeks and we improved the occasion as lovers will.

And then, not too long ago, I met an old friend who asked me how Claire was. I said, "Fine. Why? You sound concerned."

He said, "I met her in the library last month, swatting over a Latin dictionary, and she seemed odd. She snapped at me."

"Do you remember when it was?"

"In April. I know it was a Monday—"

"Monday, the twentieth," I said at once. "She had a paper due then and was making final corrections. I imagine she didn't welcome distractions."

But he said, "No. It wasn't the twentieth. I remember that the day after, my wife complained of a sore throat and we had to cancel a dinner engagement. I remembered Claire's moodiness the day before and wondered if something were going around. That dinner we cancelled was on Tuesday, the fourteenth, I remember that well. So I saw Claire in the library on the thirteenth."

That ended that, but I clung to the hope that Claire had been at work in the library on some other project that day.

"Claire," I said when we met a few hours later, "did you start translating the Cicero passage on the thirteenth?"

She looked at me in surprise. "Of course!"

I couldn't believe it. "*Not* on the fifteenth?"

"Why on the fifteenth?" she countered. "I wanted as early a start as possible. I love you, darling, but I intended to win."

I turned on my heel and walked away. That was a week ago and I haven't seen her or communicated with her since. She called me once, but I simply hung up.

Perhaps I could understand her eagerness causing her to break the rules, but what put her over the edge as far as I was concerned

was her calm assumption that cheating was permissible—the implication that if I were fool enough to follow the rules, I deserved to lose. She had no conscience in the matter, and no honor, and that meant she wasn't the woman I thought she was and I couldn't continue the relationship.

That's the story, gentlemen, and, as I told you, there's no mystery about it.

There was a silence for several moments, and then Halsted said, "You didn't put it to her directly, Mr. Soskind? You didn't say 'Why did you cheat, Claire?'"

"I didn't have to. It was clear enough."

There was another silence. Soskind said, defensively, "Come on. Are you saying I should have overlooked the matter? Forgive and forget?"

Rubin said, "You might have misheard the rules. Perhaps Professor Trent said—"

"The rules were in writing," said Soskind. "There was no mistaking them."

Avalon said, hesitantly, "Since the young woman was so suitable in all other respects, and since you still seem to be in love with her—"

Soskind shook his head violently. "That lack of honor cancels out everything. If I am still in love, that's a problem time will cure."

Drake peered through a cloud of cigarette smoke. "If *you* had won instead of her, would you be making all this fuss?"

"I certainly hope so. If I acted otherwise, I would be as bad as she."

Drake shrugged. "You're a stiff-necked moralist, Mr. Soskind. The club's own stiff-necked moralist is Henry. What do you say, Henry?"

Henry, who was standing thoughtfully at the sideboard, said, "I believe there *is* a mystery to this. The young woman seems to have acted out of character."

Soskind said, "I prefer to think I didn't understand her character until she finally revealed it."

"If I may speak freely, Mr. Soskind—"

"Go ahead," said Soskind, with a bitter snort. "Say what you want. It can neither hurt nor help."

Henry said, "Isn't it possible, sir, that Claire was entirely in the right and that you have behaved hastily and unfairly?"

Soskind reddened. "That's ridiculous!"

"But was the fifteenth of April indeed the starting point?"

"I've already said that was in writing."

"But, Mr. Soskind, you also told us that Professor Trent tended to be Latinate in expression. Did he actually write 'the fifteenth of April' or 'April fifteenth'?"

"Well, of course, he— Oh, I see what you mean. No, he wrote 'the ides of April,' but what's the difference?"

"An enormous one," said Henry. "Everyone thinks of the ides of March in connection with the assassination of Julius Caesar, and everyone knows that is March fifteenth on our calendar. It is only natural to suppose that the ides of every month falls on the fifteenth, but I checked the encyclopedia while you were completing your account and that is true only of March, May, July, and October. In all the other months, including April, the ides fall on the thirteenth of the month. Since the ides of April falls on April thirteenth, Claire began on that day, very correctly, and was surprised that you questioned the matter and seemed to expect her to delay two days for no reason."

Halsted was at the encyclopedia. "Henry's right, by God," he said.

Soskind's eyes opened in a fixed glare. "And I started two days late."

Henry said, softly, "If Professor Trent had known you didn't know when the ides of April were, I suspect you would have lost the competition by a somewhat wider margin."

Soskind seemed to collapse inward in his chair. He said, in a mutter, "What do I do now?"

Henry said, "My experience with matters of the heart, sir, is limited, but I believe you had better waste no more time. Leave *now* and try to see the young lady. She may give you a chance to explain, and what I know of such matters leads me to think you had better grovel. —Grovel quite abjectly, sir."

"Q"

# DETECTIVERSE

*OH, HENRY!*

*(dedicated to Isaac Asimov)*

*by JEANETTE WEISS*

Black Widowers they call themselves,  
And monthly they convene,  
Six gentlemen who share a love  
For elegant cuisine.

They alternate the role of host,  
And he's allowed one guest,  
Who (barring it's a female)  
Is welcomed by the rest.

No topic is beyond their ken,  
No theme is too arcane,  
No subject falls beyond the reach  
Of their collective brain.

Above the clinking of the glass,  
Amid the dishes' clatter,  
Their waiter, Henry, tends their needs,  
Admiring the chatter.

When, finally, the end arrives  
To dining and libation,  
The guest presents a conundrum  
For abstract cerebration.

Though eruditely they pursue  
Each complex convolution,  
It's Henry, each and every month,  
Who serves up the solution.

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a **NEW** short story by

**ANNA CLARKE**

*In Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers, Larry E. Grimes writes, "The talent of Anna Clarke is immense. She breathes a true creator's breath into old conventions and clichés precisely because, as a writer of mysteries, she is bold enough to fashion them from the mystery of writing itself . . ."*

*"Are you afraid of me, Will? Do you think I've come to take my revenge?" She smiled at him and picked up the book that lay on the bedcover. "Unnatural Death. Isn't that the one where murder is committed by injecting air into the bloodstream?" She flipped through the pages. "Yes, this is it. I've often wondered how it would work in practice. Of course, Dorothy Sayers would never have written anything that wasn't theoretically correct. A very interesting idea . . ."*

## **CAESAR'S WIFE**

by **ANNA CLARKE**

The door opened.

It was a white door, like all the others in the nursing-home. The walls of the room were white and so were the sheets and the pillows. But the man who lay in the bed had dark hair, and his face, though lined with pain and strain, was not old. He held a gaudy-colored paperback in his left hand and with the other hand turned the pages with a nervous impatient movement.

He did not look up when the woman came into the room.

"Put the tray there, Nurse. I'll pour for myself."

It was a strong voice, used to giving orders. Two more pages of

© 1983 by Anna Clark.

the book were hastily turned. Apart from the faint rustle of paper there was silence in the room. The white door was closed. Outside the long windows the lawn and trees were white with snow. It was New Year's Day.

The man in the bed glanced sideways and saw the pale-blue nurse's uniform a couple of feet away.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked wearily. "I told you I'd help myself if I wanted any tea."

"Yes, sir. I heard you." The voice was low and pleasant with a faint trace of a Scots accent. "But I thought you might wish to speak to an old acquaintance."

The man in the bed looked up at last. His eyes closed, opened again, and stared as if hypnotized. His mouth opened to speak but no sound came except a gasp for breath.

The woman in uniform sat down on the edge of the bed and held his wrist. "You're in a bad way, Will," she said.

"Of course I am. That's why I'm here." The breathing was still labored. He waited a moment before going on. "You shouldn't have come in like that without warning. I'm not supposed to have any sudden shock."

"It might have killed you?"

She smiled at him. She was a capable-looking woman in her mid-forties, with hazel eyes and thick dark-red hair.

"What are you doing here, Maggie?" His voice had regained its strength. It was full of suspicion, with perhaps even a hint of fear. "Why did they let you in?"

She laughed. "I'm on the staff. Since yesterday. I rang the Institute and your secretary told me you were here. So I rang Matron and asked if she'd got any vacancies. There's often a quick turnover of staff in these posh clinics. And no one can deny that I'm good enough for the job. Aren't I, Will?"

He didn't answer. His fingers were groping for the bell. She waited until he was just about to press it and then leaned forward and jerked the cord out of his reach. "If you require the services of a nurse," she said, "there's no need to ring for anybody else."

He collapsed against the pillows, breathing with difficulty again. His eyes were full of hatred.

"Are you frightened of me, Will? Do you think I've come to take my revenge?" She smiled at him and picked up the book that lay on the bedcover. "*Unnatural Death*. Isn't that the one where murder is committed by injecting air into the bloodstream?" She flipped

through the pages. "Yes, this is it. I've often wondered how it would work in practice. Of course, Dorothy Sayers would never have written anything that wasn't theoretically correct. A very interesting idea."

She put down the book and looked at him in a speculative manner. He got his breathing under control and managed to speak with some firmness. "Before you decide to carry out an experiment in undetectable murder, may I remind you that it will probably be unnecessary? I'm seriously ill and expecting to undergo drastic heart surgery."

"I know," she said.

"Then what is the purpose of this conversation? You've given me a disagreeable shock. You have made a vague threat to end my life rather sooner than it might end in any case. If you choose to do so, I cannot stop you. I am helpless. But I fail to see what satisfaction it would give you. In fact, it might even be a kindness to me to die quickly and painlessly rather than suffer a long-drawn-out illness. I don't understand what you're aiming at."

"You haven't changed," she said softly. "Sir William Freeborn, Director of the Morris Research Institute, is just the same as young Dr. Will Freeborn, very short of money but very full of ambition. You're ice-cold, ice-hard. You always were." Suddenly she laughed. "Heart surgery! That's really rather funny. You haven't got a heart. You never did have."

"I never pretended to. It was you who decided that I was in love with you."

"You didn't mind making use of my feeling for you."

"Naturally. It was on offer."

"You actually asked me to marry you, remember?"

"I remember. Doctors often do marry nurses. It can be convenient when starting in practice."

"But not so convenient as marrying a rich heiress."

There was a short silence before he said: "I admit I behaved badly to you, Maggie. But I'm not the only man who has broken off an engagement. Nor woman either, come to that. It's better than an unhappy marriage."

She got up, walked to the window, stood for a moment looking out at the snow-covered garden and the darkening sky and the lighted windows of the neighboring buildings, then drew the curtains across. They formed a great golden square against the white walls of the

room. Then she turned back to the bed. He was slumped over to one side and scarcely seemed to be breathing.

"I saw you ring the bell," she said calmly. "You were reflected in the glass of the window."

She came nearer.

"You really are frightened of me, aren't you, Will?" There was a sort of wondering exultation in her voice. But a moment later her eyes softened, became troubled and doubtful.

He didn't see the change of expression. Pain and weakness had conquered his body, but his mind was working swiftly and clearly. Somebody else would answer the bell. And then there would be Cynthia's daily visit. All he had to do was to keep the deadly syringe away until Cynthia came. Even if this crazy woman prevented him from talking to any other of the staff, she couldn't prevent him from talking to his wife. And once Cynthia realized who she was and why she was here—

The white door opened again. A brisk voice spoke: "Yes, Sir William? Is anything wrong? Ah, Nurse Mackay—you're here already."

"I thought it might be urgent, Matron."

There was the faint sound of starched cloth in movement and then the man in the bed felt a cool hand on his forehead.

I'm in danger, Matron. His lips didn't move but his mind willed her to understand. Save me, Matron. This woman's never forgiven me for jilting her. She's going to kill me.

"He seems to be in some distress," said the Matron.

"I see from the notes that he may have a Valium injection if necessary," said Nurse Mackay.

The head that the Matron was lightly touching jerked violently under her hand. "It's all right, Sir William," she said. "We can give you something to make you more comfortable."

"No, no." He found his voice at last, opened his eyes, and saw bending over him a plump pink face. "Matron—my wife will soon be here. I want to talk to her. I don't want to be drugged."

"It's only Valium, Sir William. We won't give you any hypnotics."

"Matron." He clutched her hand with both his own. "Stay with me till she comes."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Sir William. I have an appointment in two minutes' time."

"Then give me the injection yourself."

His eyes pleaded with her. She straightened up and looked at Nurse Mackay in a puzzled manner. "I think he's rather nervous of

a strange face, Matron," said the red-haired nurse. "I've come across it before in heart cases."

The two uniformed figures moved together towards the washbasin in the alcove. They spoke in whispers, but the man in the bed, whose hearing was exceptionally acute, could just make out what they said.

"You don't mind, Nurse?" It was the Matron's voice. "This doesn't imply any lack of confidence in you, but I think it's best to humor him."

"Of course. I quite understand. Men are such cowards, aren't they?"

"Particularly doctors when they are ill."

Half a minute later the Matron said: "There you are, Sir William. That should ease the pain and the breathing and it will enable you to enjoy Lady Freeborn's visit."

He managed to make a suitable response although his mind was racing with panic again. He had heard them speaking but had not been able to see them while they stood in the alcove. Which of them had filled the syringe? Or not filled it?

Reason asserted itself. That injection was perfectly correct. Maggie couldn't do anything while the Matron was actually in the room. Somehow or other he must keep her here until Cynthia came. After all, he was a Very Important Patient. Or did she think she must give preference to some politician or pop-star?

"I think we will leave Sir William to rest now, Nurse," said Matron, picking up the untouched tea-tray.

"Certainly."

The red-haired nurse followed her superior out of the room. The white door closed behind them. The man in the bed breathed more freely.

In the foyer of the nursing-home stood a large Christmas tree. Festoons of holly and glinting silver hung from the white ceiling. The girl at the reception desk was young and rosy. She smiled up at the tall thin woman who was clasping her fur coat around her as if it were her defense against a hostile world. "Good afternoon, Lady Freeborn."

"Good afternoon." It was a shy, uncertain voice.

The red-haired nurse, who had been adjusting the decorations on the tree, came forward to greet the newcomer.

"I'm Nurse Mackay," she said. "I'm looking after your husband

now. I'm afraid you may find him a little sleepy. Matron had to give him an injection to ease the pain and calm him down."

"Oh. Really?"

Cynthia Freeborn had a narrow nervous face. No beauty, thought Maggie. No personality. No talents. Just money. Does she know that's why he married her? Of course she must know. She looks very miserable.

"Try not to worry too much, Lady Freeborn," she said reassuringly as they moved slowly along the white corridor. "There is every hope of a successful outcome and a new lease of life for him."

Cynthia Freeborn didn't look any happier at these words. Maggie opened a door for her and took a long time to shut it again. During the time it was open she stood in the corridor and heard Sir William say: "You're late as usual."

"I'm sorry. The traffic was bad. I've brought the books you wanted, Will."

"Never mind that now. I've got something extremely important to tell you. I want you to do something for me. Immediately. Do stop fussing around, Cynthia, and sit down and try to concentrate for once. Is that door shut properly?"

Outside the closed door, Maggie Mackay stood listening but couldn't make out what was said. A nurse came along the corridor pushing a trolley. They smiled briefly at each other and then Nurse Mackay walked back to the foyer with a purposeful air.

"If Lady Freeborn asks to see Matron," she said to the girl at reception, "please tell her that Matron is not free but that she has asked me to speak to her instead. I'll be in Room Seventeen."

The rosy girl nodded. She was speaking to someone on the telephone.

In Room Seventeen a teenage boy who had suffered severe burns in an accident was drifting in and out of a nightmarish sleep. Nurse Mackay spent a long time with him, soothing him, trying to make him comfortable. She was an efficient and compassionate nurse.

Cynthia, she said to herself as she held the boy's uninjured hand, what a poor creature she is. I wonder how she'll react when he tells her I'm threatening to murder him. I'm sure he bullies her.

"I know it's hard to be patient, Robert," she said aloud, "but I promise you you're going to get quite well. Skin is a very wonderful thing. It will grow again as good as new."

There was a knock at the door and the nurse who had been pushing

the trolley put her head round it. "Are you Nurse Mackay? If so, you're wanted in Reception."

In the foyer there was an argument going on between Lady Freeborn and the rosy girl.

"But I must see Matron!" cried Cynthia Freeborn. "It's essential that I see her! Without a moment's delay!"

The fur coat was hanging open, the narrow face was flushed, the pale-blue eyes staring. She was like a cornered rabbit.

"I'm very sorry," said the rosy girl, "but I'm afraid she won't be free for at least another half hour. Meanwhile, Nurse Mackay—"

"No, no!" It was a pitiful little shriek. "I don't want to talk to Nurse Mackay!"

Maggie came forward. "I think there must have been some misunderstanding. Please will you let me explain, Lady Freeborn? If you are not satisfied with my explanation, then you can tell Matron about it when she is free."

There was something both soothing and compelling in her voice. It was the voice of authority: Nurse knows best. Cynthia Freeborn followed her to a quiet corner of the foyer and they sat down facing each other across a low table.

"I don't know whether Sir William ever told you," said Nurse Mackay, "that I was engaged to him before he met you. He broke off the engagement the day before our wedding. No reason given. Just that he had changed his mind. Did you know that? Before this evening, I mean?"

"He told me *you* had broken off the engagement," muttered Cynthia Freeborn, avoiding Maggie's eyes and fiddling with the clasp of her handbag.

"Did you believe him?"

"Well, I did wonder." The pale face turned crimson—not prettily, like the face of the receptionist, but in ugly blotches. "I mean, I would never have given him up myself. I thought I was very lucky. Of course, I hardly knew him at that time."

The last words were scarcely audible. Lady Freeborn opened her handbag and took out a tiny embroidered handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes. "I'm sorry you were made unhappy," she added in a stronger voice.

"Oh, that's all old history," said Maggie Mackay. "I recovered from it and got on with my life, but I'm afraid I couldn't resist teasing him a little just now, and it looks as if he didn't realize I was teasing

but took it seriously. That's what I wanted to explain. Did he tell you I had threatened to kill him?"

"Yes, he did." The handkerchief was put away, the handbag was closed with a final snap, and for the first time the pale-blue eyes looked frankly at Maggie. "He told me you were going to cause a stoppage in the bloodstream by injecting air from an empty syringe into an artery and that I must tell Matron immediately, and that on no account were you to be allowed near him. He was really frightened. I've never seen him frightened before."

"Neither have I."

The two women stared at each other. She no longer loves him, thought Maggie; I suppose he's been unfaithful to her again and again.

"Of course I didn't threaten him, Lady Freeborn," she said aloud. "Quite apart from anything else, I love my profession and I would never do anything to harm my nursing career. All that happened was that I said I remembered the method of murder in the book he was reading and that I wondered if it would really work. It was he who jumped to the conclusion that I was plotting revenge. I suppose he has a guilty conscience towards me."

"I hope he has," said the other woman with surprising vehemence. "Do you really think he's going to come through this operation?" she added more quietly.

"Yes, I do." Maggie explained a little of what was to be done. Cynthia Freeborn listened intently. Their two heads came closer together.

"I once did a little nursing myself," said Cynthia presently. "My sister was a diabetic. I used to do her injections for her because she hated doing it herself."

Maggie showed polite interest. They talked for a little longer and then Cynthia stood up.

"I don't think I need wait to see Matron," she said. "I quite understand everything you've told me and I have every confidence in your skill and discretion. Thank you for everything, Nurse Mackay."

"Thank you for listening to me, Lady Freeborn."

They walked together to the main entrance of the building. It seemed to Maggie that Cynthia had acquired a new dignity. She looked less nervous, more composed. She even seemed to be walking taller.

"I shall come in and see my husband again later this evening," she said. "I hope I may see you then, Nurse Mackay."

"I hope so too," said Maggie.

But they didn't meet again.

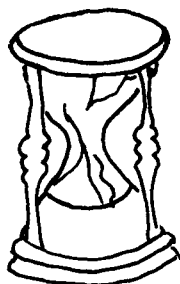
At ten o'clock Nurse Mackay came into Sir William's room to prepare her patient for the night and found him lying silent and still. She put a hand on his wrist, raised the closed eyelid, and busied herself about him for several minutes more. Then she glanced round the room with a puzzled expression on her face and finally moved over to the alcove. On the shelf next to the washbasin lay the tray of nursing equipment, including the hypodermic syringe Matron had used earlier in the afternoon.

Nurse Mackay picked it up and examined it carefully.

"How very extraordinary," she muttered to herself. "Surely it can't be—" The puzzled frown deepened. Then her face cleared and she glanced across at the bed and exclaimed: "Well! Who would believe it?"

She picked up a piece of cotton wool and was about to rub it over the syringe, but stopped herself and said: "No, it's not necessary. Nobody is going to test for fingerprints. What could be more natural than such a death at such a time?"

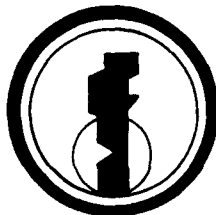
She walked back to the bed and shook her head slowly from side to side. "Poor Will. You trusted the wrong woman. I would never have harmed you. But Cynthia— I suppose it never occurred to you that she had come to hate you. And after all, Caesar's wife must be above suspicion."



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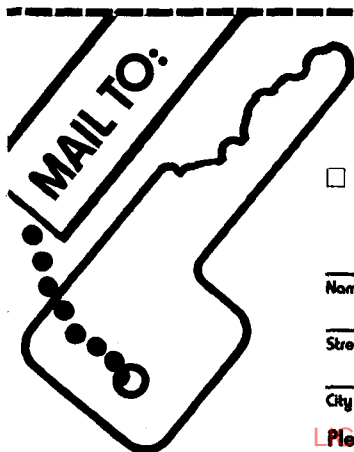
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# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

## CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

**THE BEST:** It's been 33 years since Ellery Queen polled eleven experts to determine the best short mysteries ever written. The top five vote-getters, in order, were Thomas Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," A. Conan Doyle's "The Red-Headed League," Anthony Berkeley's "The Avenging Chance," and Robert Barr's "The Absent-Minded Coterie."

How does that list stack up today? Bill Pronzini, Martin H. Greenberg, and Charles G. Waugh recently polled members of the Mystery Writers of America on their all-time favorite mystery short stories. More than 100 members replied and their five favorites, again in order, were Stanley Ellin's "The Specialty of the House," Roald Dahl's "Lamb to the Slaughter," Poe's "The Purloined Letter," Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," and Doyle's "The Speckled Band." We note that Poe and Burke are still present, if a bit lower, and Doyle is still there too, with a different but equally good story. Berkeley and Barr are gone, re-

placed by Ellin and Dahl. (And dare we say that these two stories by Ellin and Dahl show the public's changing tastes?)

The results of this latest poll will be published later this year in *The Mystery Hall of Fame* (William Morrow), an anthology of the twenty or so top vote-getters. Others include G. K. Chesterton's "The Oracle of the Dog," Jacques Futrelle's "The Problem of Cell 13," Lord Dunsany's "Two Bottles of Relish," Dashiell Hammett's "The Gutting of Couffignal," Agatha Christie's "Witness for the Prosecution," Raymond Chandler's "Red Wind," Cornell Woolrich's "Rear Window," John Dickson Carr's "The House in Goblin Wood," and stories by W. W. Jacobs, Ellery Queen, Shirley Jackson, Philip MacDonald, Fredric Brown, Harry Kemelman, Edward D. Hoch, and Bill Pronzini.

**CANADIAN SLEUTHS:** If Barr's "The Absent-Minded Coterie" is missing from *The Mystery Hall of Fame*, it is present in *Maddened by Mystery*, a fine new anthology of Canadian detective fiction edited by Michael Richardson (Toronto:

Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$17.95 Canadian). The book's thirteen authors also include Stephen Leacock, Grant Allen, Frank Packard, Vincent Starrett, Margaret Millar, and James Powell. Editor Richardson, member of the newly organized Crime Writers of Canada, contributes detailed biographical introductions and a "Who's Who in Canadian Mystery Fiction."

Also from Canada is *Sherlock Holmes, a Study in Sources* by Donald A. Redmond (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, \$24.95 Canadian). In what must be the ultimate Sherlockian endeavor, Redmond attempts to trace the origin of all character names in the Holmes saga. We learn that Doyle often used the names of neighbors and fellow medical students. We learn that Baskerville was coachman to a friend of Doyle. Strictly for advanced Sherlockians.

**SMALL PRESSES:** Attic Revivals Press continues its series of short-story reprints with a sixteen-page issue containing two mysteries about magicians by Walter Gibson and an old pulp story by Lars Anderson. Cost is \$2.50, from Bernard A. Drew, 53 Gilmore Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

A new edition of *Sherlock Holmes: Rare-Book Collector* by Madeleine B. Stern is available from Paulette Greene, 140 Princeton Road, Rockville Centre, NY 11570. It's \$15.00 for the 32-page limited paperback.

Waves Press, Richmond, Virginia, has published *The Last Murray Leinster Interview* by Ronald Payne, a twelve-page booklet in

which the late author discusses his mystery and science-fiction writing. Cost is \$10.00.

*A Dashiell Hammett Tour*, first of Herron's Literary Walks in San Francisco, is available for \$6.95 from Dawn Haron Press, % Don Herron, 537 Jones Street #9207, San Francisco, CA 94102.

**MORE ON CHRISTIE:** The latest book to examine Agatha Christie's mystery fiction is *Murder She Wrote* by Patricia D. Maida & Nicholas B. Spornick (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green U. Popular Press, \$7.95 paper, \$15.95 cloth). The authors provide interesting insights into Christie's plotting and characters, but the book suffers from a tendency to reveal solutions and to err in facts. *The Pale Horse* is listed as a Poirot book, and Poirot's death in *Curtain* is called "unique in the history of detective fiction," in apparent ignorance of *Drury Lane's Last Case* by Ellery Queen.

Also from Bowling Green is *The Dime Novel Detective*, edited by Gary Hoppenstand (\$9.95 paper, \$18.95 cloth), an anthology of five typical dime novels in facsimile reprints of the originals. Included are title listings of several dime-novel series.

**COMING ATTRACTIONS:** William F. Nolan's new biography, *Dashiell Hammett: A Life on the Edge*, is coming from Congdon & Weed in May.

Due this month from Penguin Books is *The Margery Allingham Omnibus*, reprinting her first three Albert Campion novels (\$7.95).

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# BLOODY VISIONS

by **CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

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"*Your attention, please,*" the raspy, teasing voice filters through the darkened theater just before the curtain rises on the first act of Anthony Shaffer's new thriller, *Whodunnit*. We cannot make out if the voice is that of a man or a woman, nor will it correspond with any of the characters we are later to meet on stage. But it tells us that it is the murderer speaking, and that the audience has stumbled upon a "closed-circle, telephone wires have been cut, storm washed out the bridge, *My-God-is-it-one-of-us?*", country-house murder." Broadway hasn't been treated to *that* brand of melodrama in a number of years, and with the author the celebrated creator of perhaps the best mystery play of recent times, *Sleuth*, our expectations are understandably high.

And *Whodunnit* starts fetchingly, with a wonderfully odd group of guests arriving one stormy, 1930's evening to the sumptuous library of Silas Bazeby's great manor house, all asked by the bewildered lawyer host's absent wife (it's explained she's been delayed, and likes to "fill up the house with people," but she never does turn up).

From the drunken butler to the cheery young couple to the doddering lady archeologist to the sneering aristocrat, each harbors a ghastly secret, and slithering among them is a despicable blackmailer *sans pareil* who privately ap-

proaches every guest to extort from them each according to their measure—a few thousand pounds, stocks, an annuity, details of "the forthcoming Anglo-German naval agreement." The audience does not have to be too clever to guess who will be killed—indeed, beheaded—by the close of the first act, but we are all attentive, for the murderer has whispered to us (we hear the voice periodically) that the clues to his (or her) identity will be fair. Lightning streaks across the night outside.

The second act starts out even more promisingly than the first, for there are no less than six thundering surprises in the opening minutes. And we learn a further shock: the victim's head was covered with stage makeup—"there's another person underneath that looks quite different." Mulling this is the newly arrived Scotland Yard Inspector Bowden (Fred Gwynne), who after a career of routine cases is delighted to find himself at last tackling a puzzle of classic ingredients, exactly like those in his favorite mystery books.

Although there is reference to Chesterton and Christie, the play venerates John Dickson Carr, for the detective soon fancies himself Carr's great creation, Dr. Gideon Fell—"a whopping great fellow who stomps about with a cane, drinking quarts of beer and quoting stray bits of poetry." Bowden grabs a

cane himself, but his Fell-like investigation nearly succeeds in losing him his quarry—and there is another death along the way, until at the finish the disembodied voice of the killer reveals to us who he (or she) is *not*, and why.

*Whodunnit* is stylish and fun, but unfortunately the very essence of its spirit—the meticulous evoking of old-fashioned mystery drama—narrows its appeal to those of us with traditional tastes. In today's theater that's a vanishing breed. Shaffer, who besides *Sleuth* wrote the screenplay for Hitchcock's *Frenzy* and adapted two Poirot cases into film, has attempted valiantly to recreate the structured, classic mystery play, with humor but also affection. Alas, it is not the favorite theatrical form of either modern audiences or front-row critics.

However, some contemporary mystery plays have snuck by the barriers. *A Soldier's Play*, staged by the Negro Ensemble Company and winner of a 1982 Pulitzer Prize, tells of the killing of a black sergeant in an Army camp during World War II and the official in-

vestigation which followed. It is—although not promoted as such—a structured whodunit. *Something's Afoot*, the delightful murder musical of some seasons back which spoofed *Ten Little Indians*, is finding new audiences on cable television—with Jean Stapleton now the busybody investigator Miss Tweed singing “I owe it all to Agatha Christie, Conan Doyle, and John Dickson Carr . . .”

Ira Levin is preparing a new thriller for Broadway called *Footsteps*. Eve Arden will shortly star in *The Moose Murders*, about a lakeside lodge where some eccentric guests assemble, among them an unknown killer. Sax Rohmer's treacherous Dr. Fu Manchu is about to be launched in his very own musical.

And one must not forget that Agatha Christie's venerable thriller, *The Mousetrap*, whose London producer originally thought would last a mere six months or so if lucky, has just celebrated its thirtieth birthday—still unspooling its closed-circle, country-house, “My-God-is-it-one-of-us?” thrills to packed and happy audiences.

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## INTERVIEW: ROBERT B. PARKER (1)

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This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

**EQMN:** Your latest Spenser novel, *The Widening Gyre*, was recently published by Delacorte and it's good to hear there is another

nearing completion. Spenser is constantly wrestling with the social and moral implications of his cases. When one ethic in his code conflicts with another, is that a difficult problem for you?

**PARKER:** No, it's one of the rea-

sons I write the book. I guess that all solutions to all problems are imperfect and that all codes contain the seeds of conflict. Nothing is entirely sufficient and one who is able to accept that gets closer to sufficiency than most.

**EQMN:** George J. Thompson in *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers* refers to Boston-based Spenser's "almost Thoreau-like independence." Are you independent too?

**PARKER:** I'm inclined to be inner-directed. Or to use the jargon of another discipline, I'm highly autonomous and hope to remain so. My wife Joan and my sons David and Daniel, as well as a German short-haired pointer named Pearl, easily and frequently modify my autonomy and are in every case excepted from the foregoing.

**EQMN:** Do you have a feeling for the outdoors, for nature?

**PARKER:** I have no special feel for nature and rather assume that nature reciprocates.

**EQMN:** Spenser likes baseball and carpentry. Are you a baseball fan?

**PARKER:** Yes. I love the graceful pace of baseball and all of the things about it that Roger Angell has explained better than I—dammit. I still play in a men's softball league here in Massachusetts—Lynnfield Twilight League.

**EQMN:** Nice name.

**PARKER:** I'm owner, assistant coach, and first baseman of the Lynnfield Gators. Last year we made the playoffs. I look okay in my uniform, but in the Gators' award jacket I'm breathtaking.

—There are at least five people in the league older than I am, and two or maybe three that are slower.

**EQMN:** How about carpentry?

**PARKER:** I did most of the carpentry in our previous house, which Joan and I converted from a four-room Cape to an eight-room colonial. I like to make things.

**EQMN:** How did you and your wife come to write the book about her bout with cancer, *Three Weeks in Spring*?

**PARKER:** The events in the book were, at the time, a matter of mortal consequences. If one is a writer, one is inclined to want to write about things like that. Joan was motivated more, I think, by the desire to share the experience with others who might benefit from what she learned.

It was, incidentally, eight years this April since that event and there has been no sign of further complication. I write about firmness and wit in the face of adversity. Here was a circumstance to test that, and when all four of us passed the test it seemed like something I should make into a book. It's a book I'm still quite proud of. And doing it showed me that there were books I could write that I hadn't attempted.

**EQMN:** Is Susan Silverman in the Spenser novels an ideal young woman of sorts to you? Is she based on anyone you know?

**PARKER:** Susan Silverman ain't that young, and she is surely idealized—as is Spenser. She's based in some aspects upon my wife Joan, though there are significant differences between them. As an actual

woman, Joan has no literary function—Susan's is to interpret and define Spenser. She has no life other than that which is dramatized in Spenser's narration. Joan has an independent existence and is not required to define and explain me, though upon occasion I could use some definition and explanation.

What Susan and Joan share mostly is the sense of humor, the intelligence, the balance, the beauty—Joan is, I think, better-looking than Susan and I'm just slightly less so than Spenser, but my nose is straighter—and above all the electric charge that makes Joan seem a bit realer than anyone else I've known. If one cared to, one could see in the novels where Susan appears my continuing at-

tempt to articulate that quality in print, though one has but to spend five minutes with Joan to understand exactly what I'm trying to say.

*EQMN*: What are your feelings about Boston?

*PARKER*: I like Boston very much, though I wish it wasn't cold. The city itself is visually splendid and becoming steadily more graceful and pleasant if you have an income adequate to its opportunities. The sense of time-softened red brick and the recurrent encounters with history are very fine. —There's a good dollop of racism around, which I despise—though Boston is hardly unique in that. We seem to be governed by nincompoops, which I also despise, but in that also we aren't, I suspect, unique.

## THE JURY BOX

by **JON L. BREEN**

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Michael Z. Lewin was one of the most individual American writers of crime fiction to debut in the Seventies. Though he lives in Britain, where he takes time out from writing to coach a women's basketball team, the locale of his novels is the city of Indianapolis, a scene certainly not overused in mysteries. Best known for the series about private eye Albert Samson (in the Lew Archer tradition but with a voice all his own), Lewin has a second and very different continuing sleuth in tough, no-nonsense miss-

ing-persons cop Lt. Leroy Powder.

\*\*\* Michael Z. Lewin: *Hard Line*, Morrow, \$11.95. Police Sergeant Carollee Fleetwood, shot in the line of duty and the subject of much local publicity, is now in a wheelchair but determined to continue as a working officer. She is assigned to work with Powder, an unorthodox policeman whose ways of dealing with her handicap in the course of several investigations are unexpected but effective. Lewin breathes new life into the modular-type police procedural.

\*\*\* Michael Innes: *Sheiks and Adders*, Dodd, Mead, \$10.95. Sir John Appleby, attending a fancy-dress charity fete at Drool Court, finds a surprisingly large number of guests garbed as Arab sheiks. Innes ignores the conventions of both contemporary crime fiction (there is little real suspense and the protagonist has absolutely no personal stake in the case) and of his classical roots (there is practically no detection in a plot of short-story proportions), but his style, wit, and sense of comedy are triumphant. Here, by the way, is yet another mystery with a hot-air ballooning sequence.

\*\*\* Carol Clemeau: *The Ariadne Clue*, Scribners, \$12.95. The first Scribner Crime Award Novel, reportedly selected from 550 entries, is a worthy winner. In her detecting debut, classics professor Antonia Nielsen looks into a museum theft and the disappearance of a very earnest (and certainly non-culpable) graduate student. Clemeau writes and plots well, and the main clue (a Queenian dying message) is based on specialized knowledge in which the reader gets some grounding in advance. Happily, Antonia is already a series character, having appeared in an equally worthy recent *EQMM* story.

\*\*\* William D. Montalbano and Carl Hiaasen: *Trap Line*, Atheneum, \$13.95. The second book by a team of Florida journalists concerns drug and alien traffic in the vividly realized background of Key West. The hero is middle-aged, paunchy fishing captain Breeze Albury, whose greatest pride is in

his son's pitching arm. The whole novel is strong, but the sequence involving Albury's reluctant voyage to smuggle some Colombians into Florida is a piece of nautical adventure writing worthy of C. S. Forester.

\*\* Richard Neely: *Shadows from the Past*, Delacorte, \$15.95. The shooting of powerful New York newspaper publisher Charles Dain sets the stage for a mystery/saga hybrid depicting American journalism between 1916 and 1942. Though much of this is enjoyable, the novel ultimately misfires. For once Neely's surprise ending seems rather limp and shopworn. Some of the scenes reek of blockbuster schlock and the echoes of *Citizen Kane* (intentional homage judging from the wounded publisher's name) are a bit too pervasive.

Leo Bruce (Rupert Croft-Cooke) was the most self-consciously artificial of the detective-story classicists. Characters in Carr, Rawson, and Crispin may have frequently made joking references to their fictional status, but in his Sergeant Beef novels, Bruce makes them look positively naturalistic. The 1937 novel, *Case Without a Corpse* (Academy Chicago, 425 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611; \$14.95 cloth, \$6.95 paper), soundly and entertainingly written and plotted with a solution that is ingenious and just a bit incredible, is full of in-jokes for the mystery buff.

Consider, for example, this statement by Watsonian narrator Townsend, as he approaches the

village police station hoping to join the conference between Beef and a Scotland Yard consultant: "There was, of course, no reason why I should be admitted, but my reading of detective novels, which has been considerable, had taught me that an outsider, with no particular excuse, was often welcomed on these occasions, especially if he had

the gift of native fatuity, and could ask ludicrous questions at the right moment . . ."

(Note for collectors: This is *not*, as the publisher claims, a first American edition. Stokes published it in the United States in 1937, according to the authoritative Hubin bibliography and other sources.)

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"Q"

*As found by Mario A. Marinetto in the 1854 edition of The Metropolitan Song-Book . . .*

## JOHNNY SANDS

*composed by John Sinclair*

A man whose name was Johnny Sands  
Had married Betty Hague,  
And though she brought him gold and lands,  
She proved a terrible plague;  
For oh! she was a scolding wife,  
Full of caprice and whim,  
He said that he was tired of life,  
And she was tired of him.

Says he, "Then I will drown myself,  
The river runs below."  
Says she, "Pray do, you silly elf,  
I wished it long ago."  
Says he, "Upon the brink I'll stand,  
Do you run down the hill,  
And push me in with all your might."  
Says she, "My love, I will."

"For fear that I should courage lack,  
And try to save my life,  
Pray tie my hands behind my back."  
"I will," replied his wife.  
She tied them fast, as you may think,  
And when securely done,  
"Pray stand," said she, "upon the brink  
And I'll prepare to run."

All down the hill his loving wife  
Now ran with all her force  
To push him in. He stepped aside,  
And she fell in, of course.  
Now splashing, dashing like a fish,  
"Oh, save me, Johnny Sands!"  
"I can't, my love, though much I wish,  
For you have tied my hands."



## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*In August of 1981 we were interviewing candidates for the job of Editorial Assistant. One young woman who qualified highly on all counts was Alice Tufel. As it turned out, she connected with another job shortly thereafter and Karen A. Prince was hired for the EQMM job. Karen was such a find that she was promoted to the position of Associate Editor just a year later. Several months after that, we received the following "first story" from Alice Tufel. Talk about lucking out!*

*And so you have EQMM First Story Number 602 . . .*

### A NAME FOR HERSELF

*by ALICE TUFEL*

Lindsey never reads a newspaper, although she has various magazines strewn all over her small Manhattan apartment. The magazines are all similar: book reviews, news for writers, poetry quarterlies. She doesn't concern herself with the gory details of city life. She doesn't own a television set. The prime-time shows and the news don't interest her. She is too busy writing to take the time to watch television.

Lindsey has come to New York to make a name for herself, to avail herself of the city's opportunities for young, ambitious writers. Since her arrival, she hasn't made any friends to speak of. She barely supports herself with freelance editorial work and temporary typing jobs. Evenings and weekends usually find her immersed in a book or working on a new poem, oblivious to the sirens screaming outside her window or the raging automobile horns on Second Avenue.

An empty refrigerator or the lack of clean clothes draws Lindsey outside once or twice a week. Aside from that, there is her poetry class on Monday nights, which Lindsey attends unfailingly every week, devoted as a mailman in the dead of winter. The class, her

© 1983 by Alice Tufel.

small apartment, her writing: these make up Lindsey's world. She moves through it happily and alone.

Lindsey's poetry teacher usually has an announcement at the end of class. But tonight he rises from the long table silently. The group of aspiring poets, all of them accepted into his class because of the quality of work submitted to him in advance of the course, wait expectantly. As he reaches the door, he stops briefly and says, "Cleo Miller is reading tonight at 8:30 sharp. You should all try to catch her."

"Cleo Miller!" Lindsey says to the girl on her right. "I didn't know she was scheduled for tonight—I adore her stuff!"

The other girl shrugs. "She's okay. It's too cold for me to hang around, though. I'm going home before everything freezes over."

Lindsey grabs her handbag and her books and hurries out of the classroom to the box office at the other end of the hall. A sign reads:

Cleo Miller Reading Tonight

8:30 P.M.

Tickets \$6.00

Lindsey opens her wallet, hoping she has enough money. She counts out a five, a single, and a dollar in change. Enough for a ticket and the bus-fare home.

"Excuse me," she says, tapping on the box-office window, "what time is the Miller reading scheduled to get out?"

"Ten, ten-thirty, I'm not sure. Do you want a ticket?"

Lindsey bites her lip, hesitating. Her poetry class is at the "Y" on Ninety-second Street and Lexington Avenue, almost eighty blocks from her apartment and not one of the coziest neighborhoods in town after dark. Normally she takes the bus home, but normally she leaves at eight. Oh, why not? she thinks. I may never get this chance to hear Cleo Miller again. She pushes six dollars through the little window and takes her ticket.

The reading is wonderful. Cleo Miller is pretty yet stern, all done up in leather and lace. Lindsey closes her eyes, tuning out everything but the poet's voice and words. The reading is a long one and toward the end people start to leave. By the time Cleo Miller takes her abrupt bow and walks off stage, there is only a handful of people left in the auditorium.

Lindsey feels drained but good and sinks into the warm afterglow left by the reading. She stretches happily and then, layer by layer,

wraps herself up in her heavy winter garb: scarf, sweater, coat, hat, and gloves. The clock in the lobby reads 11:05.

The wind has picked up and a frosty mist is blowing through the already cold night air. The street is deserted. Lindsey weighs her options for getting home. She can walk south to the Eighty-sixth Street subway or east to Second Avenue and take the bus. The subway this time of night could be dangerous but standing alone on Second Avenue might be worse. She starts toward Eighty-sixth Street and stops. Changing her mind, she heads east for the bus stop, walking quickly, hugging her books to her chest. After what seems like forever she reaches Second Avenue.

At the bus stop, she huddles alone, stamping her feet and shivering in the cold. She strains her eyes north, searching for a bus. A cab glides past her, the sound of its tires echoing off the frozen street like a vague warning. Lindsey decides to transfer her keys and her money to her coat pocket. If anyone comes along and snatches her bag, she'll at least be able to get home.

Without warning, a voice comes from behind her. "Are the buses still running?"

She whirls around. A middle-aged man is looking at her.

"I hope so," Lindsey stutters. "I mean, I think so." She points at the schedule posted on the kiosk, not knowing if she should be relieved or afraid. The man shivers and pulls his scarf closer to his face as he reads the schedule. She stands a little apart from him. He looks all right, but . . .

They both crane their necks uptown.

Finally, a bus appears out of the blackness—but it rolls past them without stopping and continues downtown, disappearing back into the night.

"Damn," Lindsey says.

The man surveys the deserted avenue. "If a cab comes along, do you want to share it with me?" he asks.

After a moment she says "I've only got bus fare."

"I see," he answers noncommittally.

They stand silently for a few minutes more. Then, like a mirage, a taxi approaches slowly, hunting for passengers. The man steps into the street, thrusting out his arm.

"Come on," he says to Lindsey as the cab stops in front of them.

"Oh no, really, I can't."

"Come on," the man insists. "You'll freeze to death out here."

"But I told you, I've only got the cost of the bus."

"My treat," says the man. Like a father, he takes her arm and pulls her toward the cab. "I can't let you stand here by yourself all night. I'd feel guilty for the next three months."

Lindsey hesitates, searching the man's face suspiciously, but she sees nothing. Besides, she reasons, it's just as risky to remain at the bus stop. She follows him into the cab, which continues down Second Avenue.

"Where are you headed?" the man asks.

"Thirteenth and Second."

"Thirteenth Street," the man says to the young cabby.

"Please don't go out of your way," Lindsey says. "I mean, do you live below Thirteenth?"

"Yes," the man says. "Stop worrying." He laughs. "You're making me nervous."

When he turns to look at her some blocks later, Lindsey tries to pretend she doesn't notice. She can't keep it up, though, and finally she turns toward him with a little smile. "This is really very nice of you," she says, wanting to believe it.

"You shouldn't have been standing there alone this time of night," the man says. Somehow his comment breaks the tension and she laughs with relief. "It was kind of stupid."

But the man doesn't laugh. "My wife was assaulted on Riverside Drive last winter. She wanted to save money and wait for the bus. It was late at night and she was alone." He turns his head away and stares out the window in a world of his own. The cab bumps down the empty avenue.

The cabby pulls over at Thirteenth Street and turns to look at them through the plexiglass divider.

"The young lady is getting out here," the man says. "I'll be getting out further on."

The cabby nods and faces front again.

Lindsey opens the door, then turns and holds out her hand to the man. "Thank you," she says. "Thank you very much. I'm sorry about your wife."

The man grips her hand briefly and smiles. "Better get going," he warns.

She nods and runs toward her building as the cab drives away.

She gropes for her keys, relieved to be safely home. But her keys aren't in her coat pocket. Confused, she checks both pockets and then searches through her purse, her head bent down in the dimly lit alcove. Could she have dropped them somewhere between the cab and here? She stands perplexed for a moment, then buzzes a neighbor on the first floor. She waits, but no voice comes through the intercom, no buzzer sounds. She reexplores her pockets. She dumps her books on the floor and fumbles through her bag again, shaking it. She hears a jingling sound and digs deeper, her fingers racing frantically over matchbooks, her wallet and address book, papers and pens. The fear has built up again as if it had never left her.

Suddenly she freezes. The jingling sound is not coming from her purse.

"I told you you shouldn't have been standing out there alone this time of night."

Lindsey's eyes widen as the man's gloved hand flashes across the right side of her face and clamps down hard on her mouth. His other arm grabs at her waist and bears down, paralyzing her. In his left hand he's gripping her set of keys, aiming them at the door. She feels him pressed up against her back, his force desperate, as the keys move closer and closer to their target.

The first key he tries in the lock clicks into place. The man's hand turns to the right. And then, as the door starts to open, a voice comes from behind them.

"Hold it right there, Mister. Police officer."

She is shoved and sent reeling. She smacks against the door with a painful thud and crumples, stunned, to the floor. She is aware of a struggle behind her and eventually, far off, the sound of a surrendering voice. Lifting her head, she pushes herself cautiously to her feet and turns toward the sound of it. She sees a taxi on the corner and, alongside it, the cabby who had let her off minutes before is handcuffing her molester to the outside door handle of the back seat.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

Lindsey's head bobs up and down like a puppet on a string.

"I'm an undercover police officer," he says. "I saw you both at the bus stop and we've been looking for this character. When I heard him tell you about his wife I was almost certain he was the guy—he's

told that story to his other victims—and when he asked to be let off a block south of here, I doubled back.” He peers at her. “Haven’t you read about this guy in the papers?”

Lindsey falls back against the door. The keys are still dangling from the lock and she snatches them up with shaking fingers. “I don’t pay much attention to the news,” she confesses.

“It’s time you did,” he says. His experienced young eyes tell her he is guessing rightly at the sheltered life she leads and that it’s a life she can no longer afford.

Tomorrow she will pick up a newspaper. She’ll pick up at least one of the dailies every day from now on. There is a larger world outside of the one she has brought to New York with her. She will no longer count on word-of-mouth to shape her activities. She will plan her days and protect herself. She has not come to New York to make headlines. She has come to make a name for herself. There is a difference.

“Q”

## DETECTIVER SE

### *FAST FOOD*

*by J. C. HONEYCUTT*

To break out of the pen down at “Jo”  
Was the plan of cons Swifty and Moe;  
But the jail dieticians  
Developed suspicions  
When they asked for a pizza “to go.”

© 1983 by J. C. Honeycutt.

## DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

*Four months after presenting Geoffrey Shires' one-page "Shaggy Dog Story," we are pleased to present his second story—another breezy triumph in brevity . . .*

### THE CRUNCH

**by GEOFFREY SHIRES**

I can't take to a character who tells me he'll never forget the moment he decided to murder his wife. Of course he wouldn't. Get on with the story, I say.

Aunt Maud could have been murdered a dozen times over. The family tyrant, she took a sadistic joy in obliging her handful of nephews and nieces to sing for their supper. The song meant pandering to Aunt Maud's every whim; the supper was, hopefully, a place in her will. The others, always jockeying for position, plainly saw me, her acting companion-housekeeper, as a live-in opportunist. In fact, the opportunities cancelled out, for if I earned her approval one day I invariably lost it the next by some seeming gaffe.

The crunch came threefold, as disasters are imagined to come. First I burned Auntie's morning toast, then I scorched her favorite dress with an over-hot iron. But these were trivial against the rape of the Begonia Rex. Aunt Maud was obsessive about her house plants, and when I snapped Rex off at his roots, trying to curb his topheaviness with a stake, she was rabid. "I could kill you for this," she told me, slamming her bedroom door. . .

She emerged in the evening as I knocked on the door to bring her her drink. "Take it away!" she screamed. There were tiny flecks of spittle on her lips. We scuffled as she urged me to the stairs. I lifted my hand. I let it fall. Aunt Maud lurched, tripped, and fell the length of the staircase. Her neck was broken.

No, I'll never forget the moment I decided *not* to murder my aunt. The instant when I saw the cord stretched across the top step for my own destruction.

© 1983 by Geoffrey Shires.

**a radio play about Dr. Gideon Fell by**  
**JOHN DICKSON CARR**

*In the September 1944 issue, Ellery Queen presented the first Dr. Gideon Fell radio script ever to appear in print, "The Hangman Won't Wait," one of John Dickson Carr's masterly contributions to the CBS radio series, Suspense.*

*The radio play that follows, "The Black Minute," was the second play John Dickson Carr wrote for radio. It was broadcast on the BBC on February 13, 1940, from 8:20 to 9:00 P.M. When the U.S. government called Mr. Carr back to the States in 1942, he wrote many plays for Suspense. One of these, "The Moment of Darkness," aired on April 20, 1943, uses the same gimmick as "The Black Minute," but otherwise the plot is entirely different. What is most noteworthy about the Suspense version, John Dickson Carr specialist Douglas G. Greene tells us, is Peter Lorre's portrayal of a sinister medium.*

*"The Black Minute" is included in a collection of Mr. Carr's BBC radio plays, edited by Mr. Greene, to be published by Doubleday in May . . .*

## **THE BLACK MINUTE**

**by JOHN DICKSON CARR**

### *The Characters*

|                          |                                      |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| DR. GIDEON FELL .....    | <i>the detective</i>                 |
| SIR FRANCIS CHURCH ..... | <i>an elderly scientist</i>          |
| MARGERY GREY .....       | <i>his niece</i>                     |
| MR. RIVEN .....          | <i>student of psychical research</i> |
| ANNA .....               | <i>his housekeeper</i>               |
| HARRY BREWSTER .....     | <i>in the rubber-tire business</i>   |
| TAXI DRIVER              |                                      |

Copyright © 1983 by Clarice Dickson Carr.

Setting: London, 1940

*(The sound of a high wind, thin and shrill, continues throughout the following conversation. A taxi approaches and stops.)*

TAXI DRIVER *(hoarse and confidential)*: This the 'ouse, miss? Can't see any numbers in this blackout.

MARGERY GREY: Yes, this is the house. I think. *(The voice is that of a girl in her middle twenties: very pleasant, and palpably worried.)*

*(A car door opens and slams. The wind blows shrilly.)*

MARGERY: Here you are.

TAXI DRIVER *(gratefully)*: Thank you, miss. Like me to 'old a light on the steps while you go up?

MARGERY *(shivering)*: No, thanks. I can manage. Good night.

TAXI DRIVER: Good night, miss.

*(The gears grind and the car drives away. Footsteps rasp on stone steps. Then—dull and hollow, giving the impression of depths in the house—the thud of an iron knocker.)*

MARGERY *(to herself, determined but nervous)*: So this is the ogre's den! This is—

*(Front door opens. Anna, the housekeeper, speaks. She has a middle-aged, hard, thick, expressionless voice; the voice of a woman who sees much and says little.)*

ANNA *(coldly)*: Yes?

MARGERY: I want to see Mr. Riven, please.

ANNA: I'm sorry, miss. Mr. Riven isn't at home.

MARGERY *(afraid but insistent)*: My name is Margery Grey. I'm Sir Francis Church's niece. We're all coming here for the séance tonight. I'm just a bit early, that's all; and I've got to see Mr. Riven.

ANNA *(enlightened)*: Oh. You'd better come in, then.

MARGERY: Thank you. *(Crying out, startled)* Oh!

ANNA: Be careful, miss. Don't stumble. We've got no lights in the house for a minute or two. The fuses blew. Here, take my hand. *(Slight pause; then sardonically)* What's the matter? Not afraid, are you?

MARGERY: Why should I be afraid?

ANNA *(grimly)*: That's right, miss. We'll just lock up . . .

*(The door closes, and a heavy bar is shot into place. This*

*shuts out the noise of the wind, though it can still be heard blowing faintly from time to time.)*

ANNA: Now over here to the stairs. You can feel the stair carpet with your foot. Now up . . . up . . . straight on up . . .  
*(Faintly at first, far away and growing a bit louder, but never very loud, we hear the music of a violin playing "Humoresque.")*

MARGERY (*quickly*): What's that?

ANNA (*noncommittally*): It's him . . . You see that door? Where there's firelight? Go in there and wait. I'll tell him you're here.  
*(A door closes, shutting out the sound of the violin.)*

MARGERY (*to herself, bitterly*): Wouldn't you know it? All the stage trappings. Deep carpet and firelight. Suit of Japanese armor with devil mask. Globe and books . . . Drat him! *(In a lower voice, daringly but with conviction)* Damn him!  
*(The door opens and closes. Riven speaks. He has a slow, heavy, deliberate voice, not without amusement underneath; the voice of one who knows how to use words and is aware of their power.)*

RIVEN: Were you calling down curses on my head, Miss Grey?

MARGERY (*startled and incredulous*): Are you Mr. Riven?

RIVEN: I am.

MARGERY (*impulsively*): But you don't . . . I mean, you don't look anything like what I'd expected!

RIVEN (*gravely*): My dear young lady, did you expect me to come in wearing a conical hat and a robe covered with signs of the zodiac?  
*(Laughs)* I am an ordinary person like yourself. Though far from being beautiful like yourself, if you'll allow me to say so.

MARGERY (*still rather incredulous*): You're the medium?

RIVEN: I am a student of psychical research.

MARGERY (*girding up her courage and flinging out at him*): I'll tell you what you are. You're a fake.

*(In the ensuing pause, the wind is heard blowing thinly. Riven's voice is still thoughtful, but it is not pleasant.)*

RIVEN: There is no need to back away, Miss Grey. I won't hurt you. Shall we forget what you just said?

MARGERY (*fiercely*): No, we won't! *(Changing her tone)* Please, Mr. Riven, I didn't mean to offend you. I didn't. But I want you to let my uncle alone.

RIVEN (*slowly*): Sir Francis Church is a very distinguished scientist.

MARGERY: Yes, but he's an old man; an old, old man. And I won't

have them laughing at him. That's what they're all doing, and you know it.

RIVEN: Indeed?

MARGERY (*desperately*): It's true, and you know it! I shouldn't mind if you were honest and sincere about it. Maybe there is an afterlife. I don't know. Maybe we can get into communication with the dead. I don't know. But you're not like that. Do you know Sir Barton MacNeile?

RIVEN: I have that honor. He is head of the Psychical Research Society.

MARGERY: Well, *he* says you're a fake. He says no honest spiritualist will have anything to do with you. He says . . . (*She breaks off.*) Oh, I know I'm doing this badly! I'm only offending you, and all I wanted to do was to appeal to you. Will you let my uncle alone? It's impossible to live with him any more. And it's an awful thing to say, but sometimes I wish he'd—die. (*Slight pause*) Ever since you told him his wife had died of being poisoned . . .

RIVEN (*authoritatively*): Just one moment, Miss Grey. Please understand that, whatever the entities may say when they speak through my mouth, I know nothing of it . . . Er—I believe you nursed the late Lady Church before she died?

MARGERY: What do you mean by that?

RIVEN (*surprised*): Nothing. I stated a fact.

MARGERY: I don't know what you mean, and I don't care. All I know is that my uncle can't think of anything but trying to get in touch with her. He even thinks he hears her tapping at the window at night, trying to get in. (*Three sharp, quick raps are heard on a pane of glass.*) What was that?

(*Short pause, with the sound of the wind blowing thinly*)

RIVEN: I heard nothing.

MARGERY (*in a low, steady voice*): Yes, you did. You're trying to scare me. I want to go.

RIVEN: But, my dear young lady, aren't you going to stay for the séance? Sir Francis will be here in a moment. So will young Mr. Harry Brewster, (*complacently*) whom I hope to make our latest convert.

MARGERY (*pouncing*): Yes. And so will Dr. Fell.

RIVEN (*sharply*): Who?

MARGERY (*with underlying triumph*): Dr. Gideon Fell. I thought that would make you jump.

RIVEN: You invited this Dr. Fell to my house?

MARGERY: Yes, I did. He's coming with my uncle. Are you afraid to have him here?

RIVEN: I shall welcome him. Believe me, Miss Grey, you misjudge me. I am much maligned. I have no devils concealed up my sleeve. I cannot whistle the dead out of their graves at my will. Of course, if they choose to come to me, that is another matter. *(Three more sharp, quick raps on a pane of glass)* Give me your hand!

MARGERY: Why?

RIVEN: For the last time, I will not hurt you! Give me your hand!

MARGERY *(crying out)*: Uncle! Uncle! *Uncle!*

*(Her voice trails off and is lost in the loud whistling of the wind. Again we hear a motorcar draw up and stop.)*

TAXI DRIVER *(confidently)*: This is the 'ouse, gentlemen. I brought a young lady 'ere not fifteen minutes ago.

*(Sir Francis Church speaks. His voice is that of an old man—inclined at times to be fretful and querulous, but still strong and far from being senile. It is also that of a man used to commanding and dominating: probably in his earlier years a Tartar. It remains full of suspicion. But he has dignity; and, if you do not like him, you are bound to give respect.)*

SIR FRANCIS *(suspiciously)*: A young lady, you say? That must be my niece.

TAXI DRIVER: Dunno about that, guv'nor. *(Casually)* Tipped 'and-some, though.

SIR FRANCIS: We'll get out here.

*(Car door opens.)*

TAXI DRIVER *(doubtfully)*: Excuse me, sir. But can the other gentleman—the stout gentleman—manage to get out of the cab?

DR. FELL *(thunderously intervening)*: Sir, that is an implication I resent. *(Warmly)* To be stuck forever in a taxicab . . . to spend the rest of my life in a taxicab . . . to bore holes for my feet and walk about clad in a taxicab . . . is a prospect to make any man shudder. I *can* get out of here. I **WILL** get out of here. *(Heavy grunt)*

TAXI DRIVER: Thank you, sir. Good night.

*(As the cab goes off, Sir Francis speaks doggedly as though continuing an argument.)*

SIR FRANCIS: So you won't be persuaded to believe in the cause, Dr. Fell?

DR. FELL: Sir, I neither believe nor disbelieve.

SIR FRANCIS: Then you're nothing. (*Bitterly*) Hate the cause; sneer at the cause; fight the cause. But don't be indifferent to the cause. (*Changing his tone*) Oh, I know! I was a sceptic myself. I prided myself on being . . . (*still more bitterly*) . . . the cold man of science. I once wrote, "The term 'afterlife' sounds rather like 'anticlimax,' and must, I imagine, amount to much the same thing."

DR. FELL: And you don't believe that any longer?

SIR FRANCIS (*simply*): I am reborn. Elsie talks to me.

DR. FELL: Elsie?

SIR FRANCIS: My wife. She died four years ago.

DR. FELL (*quietly*): Just a moment, Sir Francis, before you lift that knocker. (*Slight pause*) Frankly, you puzzle me.

SIR FRANCIS: Oh? How?

DR. FELL: I have had some slight acquaintance with you now for a good many years. You're a fighter. You are also an intelligent man. It would take a very superior brand of tomfoolery to deceive you. (*Sir Francis snorts, but Dr. Fell goes on.*) Before coming here, I obtained some information about this Mr. Riven of yours.

SIR FRANCIS: From Lord Senlac? I had Riven at Senlac House the other night.

DR. FELL: No. From Scotland Yard.

SIR FRANCIS (*sharply*): Scotland Yard?

DR. FELL: Yes. Now you know my state of mind. Shall we go in?  
(*The wind whistles thinly.*)

SIR FRANCIS (*with concentrated bitterness*): That, eh? I see. The police persecute Riven. Even the spiritualists persecute him. And therefore I am to turn away from the pioneer. I'm to get down on my knees like another scientist and deny that the earth moves. Well, I won't do it. I know what I know. I've never been afraid of ridicule in my life, and I'm not afraid of it now. (*This seems to have exhausted him. His voice grows fretful.*) Things are hard sometimes. Very hard on a man. We must have a creed, Fell. Even you must have a creed. What do you affirm?

DR. FELL: I affirm—

SIR FRANCIS: Yes?

DR. FELL (*in a sharper, clearer tone*): I affirm that I just heard somebody scream.

(*The whistle of the wind is mingled with the heavy banging of the iron knocker. This fades away into Margery's voice.*)

MARGERY (*frightened but triumphant*): There, you see! That's my uncle downstairs now. I can hear his voice.

RIVEN (*mildly protesting*): But, my dear young lady, you act as though you thought I were trying to molest you.

MARGERY: Aren't you?

RIVEN: Hardly . . . (*significantly*) . . . at this moment. Excuse me.

(*A door opens, and Riven raises his voice.*) Sir Francis? This way.

(*A soft but heavy bump, as of someone falling on carpeted stairs. An exclamation of pain. Sir Francis's voice, angry and querulous, comes closer.*)

SIR FRANCIS: Riven! Where the devil are you, Riven? What do you mean, keeping all the lights out in this house? (*Still more querulously*) Tripped and nearly broke my knee on those stairs of yours. (*In pain*) Ffff! No, I won't shake hands. Got my hand all over dirt. (*Breaking off*) What are you doing here, girl?

MARGERY: You promised I could attend the séance, Uncle Francis.

SIR FRANCIS: Went out without your dinner, didn't you? All right! Sit down there and be quiet. (*Pauses*) Riven, this is Dr. Gideon Fell.

DR. FELL: How do you do?

RIVEN: I am honored.

MARGERY (*under her breath*): You're a bad-tempered old man, that's what you are. I won't try to help you.

SIR FRANCIS (*sharply*): What did you say, Margery?

MARGERY (*submissively*): Nothing, Uncle Francis.

RIVEN: I am sorry about the lights, Sir Francis. The fuses will be mended in a moment. In the meantime, we are waiting for Mr. Harry Brewster.

MARGERY: Listen: there's someone else at the front door now.

(*Distantly a heavy door is heard to open and close.*)

VOICE: Hullo, hullo, hullo! Anybody at home?

MARGERY (*half laughing*): That's Harry Brewster all right.

(*Harry talks himself up into the room. He is a brisk, breezy, bouncing young man in his late twenties; likeable but loud, confident, and rather credulous.*)

HARRY: Nice of you to let me in, Anna. Anna, you get older and prettier every day . . . (*Imitating a bus conductor*) Mind the step, madam! (*Bursting in*) Hel-lo, everybody! Where's the Grand Goblin and Rainmaker?

RIVEN: Good evening, Mr. Brewster.

HARRY (*with breezy heartiness*): Wot-cher, old cock? Hello, Margery. Evening, Sir Francis. Who's this?

RIVEN: Mr. Brewster, Dr. Gideon Fell.

HARRY (*breaking off, impressed*): I say! Is it? Hel-lo, Doctor. Going to catch another murderer for us?

(*Again there are three sharp, vicious raps on the pane of glass.*)

HARRY (*surprised*): Hullo! Something seems to be trying to get in.

SIR FRANCIS (*rasping*): Don't talk like that, you young fool! Do you want to attract evil forces?

HARRY (*hurt*): No offense, Sir Francis; no-o-o offense. Just trying to keep the party merry and bright. (*Amused*) The last time they turned Dr. Fell loose to catch a murderer, he nailed a BBC announcer. When that happens, nobody's safe. (*Confidentially*) What do you think about all this, Doctor? Spooks, I mean. Are you a spook-fancier?

DR. FELL (*amused*): At least, Mr. Brewster, I gather that you are a sceptic?

HARRY: Me? (*With sudden intense solemnity*) No, no, no!

DR. FELL: No?

HARRY: Not a bit of it. What I say is, these things can't be taken too seriously. I'm a modern man. A practical man. (*Breaking off to explain*) I'm in the rubber-tire business, Doctor. Here's my card. Dear old Lady Church set me up in business, bless her. (*Returns to his theme*) Well, what I say is, how do we know about these things? I believe in an afterlife. And what's believing in an afterlife *but* believing in ghosts, if you see what I mean? Or, if it's not ghosts, it's something. Maybe a scientific force. Maybe we'll discover it. No, indeed. (*Proudly*) I'm a practical man; I can believe anything.

RIVEN (*dryly*): Very aptly put. Then shall we proceed to the test?

SIR FRANCIS (*vacantly*): Yes. I feel that there will be visitors tonight.

RIVEN: First, let us see if the lights work. (*A sharp click*) Yes, they're on now. And I have a word to say in all humility to all of you. (*But he does not sound humble.*) I have been accused of being a fraud and a charlatan. (*Arrogantly, as there is a slight murmur of protest*) Oh, yes, I have! That charge has not been made against me in any of the great houses into which Sir Francis has introduced me. But it has been made here. (*Hypnotically*) Now please understand one thing. When I am in my trance, I know nothing of what goes on. If you waked me, you might kill me. I therefore

propose to answer the scoffers in their own language. I propose to submit to a test in which any fraud would be impossible. You see that door over there?

DR. FELL: We see it.

RIVEN: That door leads to a small room without windows. It has plaster walls and a bare board-floor. In the way of furniture, it contains only some chairs, a table, and a gramophone.

SIR FRANCIS: *She* will be there.

RIVEN: We shall bolt the door on the inside. I shall ask to be tied with cords to one of the chairs. We will take one further precaution which will make it absolutely impossible for me to move. Are you ready?

*(The following three voices speak swiftly on the heels of each other:)*

SIR FRANCIS: *I* am ready, by heaven.

HARRY *(through his teeth)*: Carry on, old son.

MARGERY: No! —Yes! All right.

*(A door opens.)*

RIVEN *(with smiling courtesy)*: Then—will you walk into my parlor?  
*(The sound of the wind rises and falls strongly.)*

MARGERY: It's awfully cold in here.

RIVEN: Are you now convinced, Mr. Brewster, that I am tied to this chair in such a way that I cannot possibly move?

HARRY: Ho! *Am I!* *(In an aside)* Margery, if he can get out of that, he's a ghost himself. I've even got his fingers tied together with thread.

RIVEN: If you please! We will take one further precaution. Miss Grey, will you reach into the upper right-hand pocket of my waistcoat? Don't be afraid. You will find there a small bottle of luminous paint. Have you got it?

MARGERY: Yes.

RIVEN: Please take the brush and make a plain mark in luminous paint on each side of my collar—just beside the necktie. I must apologize for these absurdities, gentlemen. But I want you to be sure. Even if I could dislodge any of these cords, I could scarcely move without being seen. You agree? *(Three voices almost simultaneously say "yes." Dr. Fell does not speak.)* Good! Then will the four of you sit down round the table? My chair will be a little way back from you all. *(Scraping of chairs on a bare board-floor)* One moment! Mr. Brewster, will you go and start the gramo-

phone? It will stop itself. When you hear my command, turn out the lights and come back to the group round the table.

MARGERY: Do you want us to clasp hands?

RIVEN: That will not be necessary.

SIR FRANCIS: I think it will be. Listen to me. (*With the ring of authority*) I've sat quietly by. I've heard you called a charlatan and myself an old fool. There are forces tonight, and they're bad. I want a chain of linked hands round this table. Margery, give me your hand.

MARGERY: You got your hand awfully dirty on those stairs, Uncle Francis.

SIR FRANCIS: Never mind that. Give me your hand. Now you, Fell, on my other side. Harry, attend to those lights and complete the circle. Quickly!

(*Faintly at some distance away, three more raps are followed by the noise of glass shattering.*)

HARRY: It seems to have got in.

RIVEN (*rather drowsily*): That was the other room. There are no windows here. Start the gramophone, Mr. Brewster.

(*A sound of footsteps on the bare board-floor. Then the scratch of a gramophone needle as the disk starts to turn, but it does not yet play.*)

RIVEN: Now. Turn . . . out . . . the . . . lights . . . please.

(*More footsteps and a click. The footsteps return to the table.*)

HARRY: Your hand, Margery. Your other hand, Dr. Fell. I felt—

SIR FRANCIS (*dully*): Be quiet. Be quiet.

(*After a pause, the music swells out, but not at all loudly.*)

RIVEN (*drowsily*): I shall be leaving you soon. Do not attempt to speak to me afterwards.

(*The music still plays for some seconds.*)

MARGERY (*in a whisper*): I felt something.

SIR FRANCIS (*fiercely*): Sh—h!

MARGERY: Those luminous-paint spots. They look like eyes. I can't stand—

RIVEN (*still more drowsily*): Do not attempt to speak to me after—

(*The speech ends in a kind of bubbling screech, rising to a cry of agony, but choked thickly as though by liquid in mouth and throat.*)

HARRY (*breathing*): For God's sake, what was it?

DR. FELL: I think we had better have the lights on.

SIR FRANCIS: Don't break the circle! Don't break—

DR. FELL (*grimly*): At the same time, I think we had better have the lights on. Mr. Riven!

(*No reply*)

HARRY (*struck with superstitious terror in spite of himself*): I say, sir, shall I—?

DR. FELL: Yes.

(*Scraping of chairs, and blundering footsteps. A chair is knocked over.*)

DR. FELL: Hurry!

HARRY: Got it!

(*A switch clicks sharply. Silence except for the music. Then Margery screams. The gramophone slows down, scratching hollowly, and stops.*)

HARRY (*after a pause; and in a low incredulous voice; almost guilty*): I don't . . . believe it.

MARGERY (*not loudly; too tense to be hysterical*): That . . . isn't blood, is it? All over Mr. Riven's neck?

SIR FRANCIS: He's holding his head in an uncommonly queer way.

DR. FELL: That, my friend, is not part of his head. That's the handle of the knife. He's been stabbed through the throat.

MARGERY: He's falling sideways.

DR. FELL: He can't fall. Not held up by all those cords.

HARRY (*with heavy and hollow incredulity*): I don't believe it. He's playing a joke on us. (*Tentatively*) And a poor joke too. Rotten bad form, if you ask me. (*Insistently*) Come on, old chap! Say something.

MARGERY: Don't touch him!

HARRY: But it can't be. You mean somebody came in here, and . . . ?

DR. FELL: The door is bolted on the inside.

(*Quick footsteps on the floor, noise of a bolt being shot back and into its socket again*)

HARRY: It's true. (*Blustering scepticism is fighting with superstitious terror.*) Go on! It's a joke. I still don't believe it. I'm not going to let you say that one of us . . .

MARGERY: Harry, that can't be. (*Slowly reflecting*) I had Uncle Francis's hand in my left hand, and Harry's hand in my right. I was holding tight.

DR. FELL: I can testify that I had Sir Francis's hand on my right and Mr. Brewster's on my left.

HARRY: And I had you on my right and Margery on my left. Neither of you let go.

SIR FRANCIS (*very tired*): If it's any satisfaction to your (*bitterly*) practical minds, I can tell you that the circle was complete. I held my niece's hand at the right and Dr. Fell's at the left. We formed a closed chain.

HARRY: But—

DR. FELL (*sternly and heavily, quieting possible panic*): One moment. (*Murmurs subside*) We shall all have questions to answer shortly. Let's be quite clear about one thing from the start . . . Did anyone let go another hand at any time? Even for a second?

HARRY: No, definitely not!

MARGERY: Never!

SIR FRANCIS: Not for a tenth of a second.

HARRY (*stupidly*): Then there's nothing for it. He didn't stab himself; not trussed up like that. And where did the knife come from? Someone must have sneaked in—

DR. FELL: Need I remind you, sir, that the door is bolted on the inside?

(*Pause*)

SIR FRANCIS: My dear friends. My good foolish friends. (*Wearily*) Do you need to be told who killed him? Fell, come here and look at this knife.

DR. FELL: Be careful. I advise you not to touch him either.

SIR FRANCIS: What does it matter? A little dirt. A little blood. A little span of life composed of the two . . . Here's a man you thought was a charlatan. He's dead.

HARRY: Well, you needn't look at me like that. I didn't kill him.

MARGERY: Then who did?

HARRY: I don't know. But I mean to find out. I'm a practical man, and I'm not going to be put upon. (*Almost pleading, as though urging someone to give up a tedious joke*) Come on, now. Who let go somebody's hand? Did you, Margery?

MARGERY: No, I tell you.

HARRY: Dr. Fell?

DR. FELL (*sternly*): For the second time, young man, no. Besides, you don't seem to see the difficulties in the way of that. If one of us did such a thing, he would require two accomplices—one on each side of him. I'm afraid it won't do.

HARRY: But the thing's impossible.

SIR FRANCIS: By ordinary standards, yes.

HARRY: Ordinary standards?

SIR FRANCIS: Yes. And if you want to see how impossible . . . what

you call impossible . . . come closer and look at the knife. (*Fiercely*) Oh, come, man! Will you let an old fool look where you daren't? . . . That's right . . . The handle of that knife is made of polished steel, as bright as new silver. If you don't mind getting close to him, bend down and breathe on the handle. Yes, I said breathe on it! . . . You see?

HARRY: What about it?

SIR FRANCIS: There are no fingerprints on the handle.

HARRY (*after confused thought*): But look here! Gloves . . . or a handkerchief . . .

SIR FRANCIS: A handkerchief, or even gloves, would have left smudges. There are no smudges. (*Vacantly*) No human hand held that knife.

HARRY: You're not trying to tell us he was murdered by a . . .

(*A sharp, heavy knocking at the door interrupts him.*)

MARGERY (*now near hysteria*): Is it coming for the rest of us?

HARRY (*in a commonsense voice*): Nonsense, old girl. It's only Anna.

The housekeeper or maid or whatever she is.

MARGERY: Then why don't you open the door?

HARRY: I will. I—

(*The knocking begins again. We hear hesitant footsteps, the sound of a bolt shot back, and the door sharply opened.*)

HARRY (*with a quick breath, as though he half expected someone else*): It's Anna. (*Angrily*) What did I tell you?

ANNA: Excuse me, sir. I heard a kind of sound I shouldn't have heard. Is anything . . .

(*She breaks off, evidently catching sight of Riven. The exclamation she gives is not loud, nor anything like a scream; it is more like that of someone being hurt, but it is very definite.*)

DR. FELL: Yes. Someone has killed Mr. Riven. You had better go for the police.

ANNA: I'll dial 999. I've always wanted to dial 999.

DR. FELL: You don't seem very surprised.

ANNA: Me? Naow. I'm not surprised. (*Thoughtfully, without pity*)

Through the throat, eh? He always was one for talking.

(*The door closes.*)

SIR FRANCIS: I must get out of here.

DR. FELL: Steady, my lad. Take it easy.

SIR FRANCIS (*brusquely*): I'm quite all right. Just a bit queasy, that's all. (*Shivers a little*) I want to get out of this room! It must be

deadly cold in here, even for you young people. Can't we at least go into Riven's study?

DR. FELL: Why not? But I don't think any of us had better go further than the study.

SIR FRANCIS (*snapping at him*): Still materialistic, eh?

DR. FELL: I don't think you quite understand my attitude towards these matters. I am very sympathetic towards supernatural happenings . . . when they are genuine supernatural happenings.

HARRY: When they are—

DR. FELL: Let me make it clearer. Suppose you tell me that the ghost of Julius Caesar appeared to Brutus before the Battle of Philippi and warned him of approaching death. All I can say is that I know nothing about it. But suppose you tell me that the ghost of Julius Caesar walked into the cutlery department at Selfridge's, bought a stainless-steel knife, paid for it with spectral banknotes, and then stabbed Brutus in the middle of Oxford Street. All I shall beg leave to murmur, gently, is: rubbish. You cannot mix the two worlds like that. (*More sternly*) This was a human crime, planned by a human being. Don't you see that those two luminous points on Riven's collar showed the murderer . . . or murderess . . . exactly where to strike?

MARGERY (*in a low voice*): In the dark?

DR. FELL: In the dark.

HARRY: But, hang it, Riven himself suggested using the luminous paint!

DR. FELL: Yes. After careful prompting by somebody before we arrived. How else did he happen to have that bottle so conveniently in his pocket?

HARRY: Prompted by . . . ?

DR. FELL: The murderer.

MARGERY: But, Dr. Fell, there was nobody here before the rest of you arrived. (*Laughs*) Except me, of course.

SIR FRANCIS (*curtly*): Be good enough, Margery, not to speak until you're spoken to . . . Are you telling us, my friend, that you know how this crime was managed?

DR. FELL: I rather think so.

SIR FRANCIS: Are you saying that somebody got in through that bolted door after all?

DR. FELL: No.

SIR FRANCIS (*with increasing shrillness*): Do you mean that one of us got a hand loose in order to stab Riven?

DR. FELL: No.

*(The wind is heard thinly.)*

HARRY *(not loudly)*: In just about one minute, I'm going to give a yell and go mad. If you don't want to see me rolling on the hearth rug, say what you mean. —I suppose it wasn't suicide?

DR. FELL: No. *(Sincerely)* Believe me, I am not making mysteries. You have made the mysteries. Your minds work like the minds of . . . shall we say? . . . modern dictators. The old-time dictator first started wars and then won medals. The modern dictator first puts on medals and then starts wars. That is your trouble. You have got the crime turned the wrong way round.

MARGERY *(helplessly)*: No, Harry, don't look at me. *I* don't know what he's talking about. When we heard Riven utter that horrible cry . . .

DR. FELL *(abruptly)*: One moment. How do you know it was Riven who uttered the cry?

HARRY: *What?*

DR. FELL *(in a louder, slower voice)*: I said, what reason have you for supposing that it was Riven who uttered the cry?  
*(Pause)*

HARRY *(dazed)*: But . . . wasn't it?

DR. FELL: You see, that was what the murderer wanted you to think. You heard a terrible kind of screech, which seemed to have death in it. Presently we turned on the lights and found a man with a knife in his neck. So we assumed what was not true. The murderer knew that the source of sound cannot be located in the dark. It was the murderer who let out that appalling cry. Riven, who was supposed to be in a trance, could not speak and ask what had happened. And we . . . including that poor, blind fool, myself . . . we fell straight into the trap. We broke up the circle. It was at least eight seconds before the lights could be turned on. And during that interval, the murderer merely leaned across and stabbed Riven through the neck. The luminous marks on the collar showed him exactly where to strike.

HARRY *(hollowly)*: I don't believe that. You can't prove it. *(Breaking off)* Who did that?

DR. FELL: Before I answer that question . . .

SIR FRANCIS *(very coolly)*: Yes?

DR. FELL: Before I answer that question, I should like to look at Margery's hand.

MARGERY: No, you don't. Why do you want to look at it? That's the

second time tonight somebody's asked. Riven wanted to. Why? There's nothing on them—either of them. Look! They're perfectly clean.

DR. FELL (*heavily*): They are . . . Mr. Brewster, you tell me that you are in the rubber-tire business. I think I have your card here. Then you would know something about liquid rubber?

HARRY (*harshly*): Yes, I do. What about it?

MARGERY (*reflecting*): Harry, he was sitting just behind you.

DR. FELL (*sharply*): One moment. Now, Mr. Brewster, suppose a murderer, after the fashion of many continental criminals, were to paint his fingers and a part of his hand with liquid rubber? He would leave no fingerprints, I think. Not even fabric-mark traces. It would form a thin coating, not even discernible to the touch. The one thing the murderer could not disguise would be its color. What is the color of liquid rubber?

HARRY (*blankly*): Why, it's . . . smudgy kind of stuff. Medium or dark grey in color, rather like . . . (*As the meaning of this flashes over him, he hesitates and then brings out the word with a jerk of inspiration*) . . . dirt!

MARGERY (*crying out*): No!

DR. FELL: Exactly. Then the murderer is the man who staged that unnecessary fall on the stairs, to account for the large amount of "dirt" on his right hand. He is the man who . . . though he was tightly holding Miss Grey's hand for some time during the séance . . . transferred no trace of that "dirt" to her left hand. See for yourself. He is the man who refused to wash his hands before the crime, but wanted to get out of the room afterwards. To wash his hands! He is the man who has that betraying stuff on his fingers now. (*Wearily, without triumph*) In short, Sir Francis Church.

(*Below and distantly, the iron knocker on the front door begins to pound.*)

MARGERY: Uncle Francis! Look at me! Look round!

SIR FRANCIS (*calmly*): Yes, my dear?

MARGERY: Aren't you going to say anything? Don't just sit there and nod at the fire. Aren't you going to tell him it's not true?

SIR FRANCIS: Why, my dear, what he says is true.

MARGERY: I don't believe it.

SIR FRANCIS (*with a cynicism so deep that it sounds almost careless*): A little dirt. A little blood. A little span of life composed of the two. I've nothing much to lose there. But for a man to be forced

to lose the one thing in life he knows to be of any value, his intellectual self-respect . . . (*Breaking off*) Margery, you're over twenty-one. It's time you faced at least some of the facts. (*Bluntly*) I killed my wife. And that swine in there knew it.

MARGERY (*wildly*): Don't say anything more! Keep your voice down. I can hear Anna coming now. She's . . .

ANNA (*interrupting, with subdued triumph*): That's the police at the door. They said they were sending the inspector from the divisional station. Shall I bring 'em up?  
(*The door knocker pounds again.*)

SIR FRANCIS (*almost affably*): Bring them up, Anna. Bring them up! This is quite a triumph for you, Dr. Fell.

DR. FELL: No. Believe me; I don't want triumphs like this. (*Bitterly*) So it was blackmail, then? That's what they said about him at Scotland Yard.

SIR FRANCIS (*almost surprised*): Blackmail? (*Contemptuously*) If it had been the ordinary kind of blackmail, do you think I should have minded? Oh, no. I should have paid. But do you know what that man wanted? He wanted to be known as a great medium. He wanted the world to think he had made a convert of me. He wanted me to introduce him into the houses of my friends as a great medium. (*With rising intensity*) He wanted a man of science to babble the degrading nonsense he put into my mouth. He even compelled *me* . . . the one person whose honesty everyone trusted; yes, trusted . . . to play his paltry little parlor tricks while he sat tied in a chair. If you can think of any way for Frank Church to sink lower than that, just tell me what it is.

MARGERY (*murmuring*): Then that was why . . .

SIR FRANCIS: That was why. It surprised him very much when I insisted on our linking hands round the table tonight. But he learned the reason presently. (*Reflectively*) I don't mind what they do now. Even when I stand in a dock . . .

DR. FELL: Need you stand in a dock?

SIR FRANCIS: What do you mean by that?

DR. FELL: If you killed your wife, you deserve to be hanged. But you don't deserve this. You have been a great man, and I will not see you shamed.

(*The loud banging at the front door begins again. Anna's voice is heard distantly, calling angrily.*)

ANNA: All right, not so fast! I'm coming.

DR. FELL: There is still time if you hurry. Get out of here quickly.

Scrub that stuff off your hands. Then come back here and tell what story you like. I am no policeman. Let them find out who killed Riven if they can.

SIR FRANCIS (*incredulously*): You . . . mean . . . that?

MARGERY (*frantically*): Of course he means it! So do all of us. Only hurry, hurry, hurry! They're . . .

(*The bar is drawn back on the big door below, and we hear it creak open.*)

ANNA (*distantly*): You'd better come in, the lot of you. Straight upstairs.

SIR FRANCIS (*with growing incredulity*): Do you support this too, Harry?

(*No reply. Sir Francis's voice grows harsh.*)

SIR FRANCIS: Well, what is it? Do you support this or don't you?

HARRY: I don't like it, sir, and that's flat. But, if Margery says so, I'll stand by you. (*Hastily*) Only for Lord's sake clear out of here quickly, before they catch you with that stuff on your hands.

MARGERY: Sh-h! Hurry!

SIR FRANCIS (*with maddening deliberation*): What about Anna?

DR. FELL: The good Anna is undoubtedly an old accomplice of Riven's. Also, it was undoubtedly Anna who made all those very crude and clumsy rappings on the window—with the aid of another window, an air-well, and a broomstick. Let her take her broomstick and fly away on it.

MARGERY (*screaming*): They're nearly at the door!

SIR FRANCIS (*calmly*): You're wrong, my dear. They're in the room . . . (*Breaking off*) Good evening, gentlemen. Come in. (*Blandly*) Whichever of you is the inspector, I wish to give myself up for murder. The question is, will you be able to prove it in court? I have just one small request to make before we go. Do you mind if I wash a pair of exceedingly dirty hands?

(*We hear no reply; but Sir Francis's voice takes on a curious inflection which we do not quite interpret, and are not intended to interpret.*)

SIR FRANCIS: You don't mind? Thank you. Thank you so much.

"Q"

a **NEW** Henry Turnbuckle story by

**JACK RITCHIE**

*"Henry," Ralph said admiringly, "you can get more out of less than anybody I know . . ."*

## THE O'LEARY CONSPIRACY

by **JACK RITCHIE**

I regarded the cigarette butt wedged in the ashtray slot. "The victim lit a cigarette, took a puff or two, and put the cigarette down. Moments later, he was shot. However, the cigarette continued to burn, as cigarettes will, until it reached the point at which it was wedged and then it went out. You will notice that the cigarette ash dropped from the butt in one piece. It was not tapped off in sections as would normally happen if the victim had continued to smoke."

"That's fine, Henry," Ralph said, "but what has that got to do with the murder?"

"Perhaps everything," I said, and then wisely completed the circle. "Perhaps nothing."

The victim had been Jefferson O'Leary. His niece and her two brothers, his heirs, had been under his roof at the time of the shooting and were therefore the logical suspects.

O'Leary had apparently been shot sometime after lunch—the last time he had been seen alive. None of the suspects admitted to hearing the shot, which, in the case of two of them at least, was believable, for Jefferson's study was in a detached wing of the house and virtually soundproof. None of the suspects, so they again claimed, had known that he was dead until his body had been discovered by one of the servants who was sent to fetch him when he failed to appear for dinner.

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The murder weapon, a target revolver, had been found on the floor beside a spent cartridge. There were no fingerprints on either.

It seemed obvious that the murderer had snatched the revolver from the gun cabinet at one wall, opened a drawer for ammunition—the drawer was still open and a carton of cartridges had been spilt—inserted a single cartridge into the chamber of the weapon, and then shot O'Leary. After the deed, he had wiped his fingerprints off the revolver, removed the spent cartridge from the chamber, and wiped that too.

I studied the ashtray again and then went to the wastebasket. It contained absolutely nothing.

"Ah ha," I said keenly. "What have we here? How did he light his cigarette?"

Ralph was clearly stumped. "All right, Henry, how did he light his cigarette?"

"Ralph, we went through the victim's pockets. No cigarette lighter. No book matches. Nor is there a pack of matches lying about. Nor even a burnt match in either the ashtray or the wastebasket."

I smiled triumphantly. "That can mean only one thing, Ralph. The victim did not ordinarily use a cigarette lighter. Or he simply did not have it with him. And if he was a habitual user of book matches, he was temporarily out. Therefore the murderer obligingly provided his victim with a light, using his own lighter. He allowed O'Leary to take a puff or two and put the cigarette in the ashtray. He then shot him."

Ralph rubbed his jaw. "Maybe the cigarette belonged to the killer. He lit it, got preoccupied with the murder, and forgot to pick it up again when he left."

"No, Ralph. You will notice that the filtertip of the cigarette is facing the victim, just as it normally would when he put it into the ashtray at his side."

"Henry," Ralph said admiringly, "you can get more out of less than anybody I know. What about the cigarette?"

I blinked. "Cigarette! What cigarette?"

"Where did he get the cigarette, Henry? We didn't find a cigarette case on his body or in the room. Or a pack of cigarettes anywhere. Not even an empty one." Ralph continued relentlessly. "So what we have here is that the murderer not only provided his victim with a light, but also the cigarette. All we have to do now is find out which one of our suspects smokes Dromedary Filtertips, and we've got our murderer."

I chuckled tolerantly. "Now, Ralph, murder cases aren't quite that simple."

One of the department technicians now brought me the information that gun-powder grains had been found on the hands of *all* of our major suspects.

I frowned thoughtfully. "Ralph, I smell a conspiracy."

It was clearly now time to question the suspects in depth. They were Amanda O'Leary, age 26, behind whose harlequin glasses lurked violet-green eyes, and her brothers, Eldred O'Leary, a bearded young teacher's assistant at the University, and Hercules O'Leary, a captain in the Air Force, now on leave.

We moved on to the drawing room where they were waiting.

I studied them. "I have just been informed that all of you have gun-powder grains on your hands," I smiled knowingly. "An incredible coincidence. And I do not believe in coincidences."

"Why not?" Amanda O'Leary asked innocently. "Considering all the eons past and all the eons to come, is it not an incredible coincidence that it happens to be today and we are here?"

I had the feeling that this woman might give me trouble. "Can anyone explain about this coincidence?"

"Well," she said, "if we can accept the premise that there really never has been a past and there will be no future, then—"

I quickly held up a hand. "I mean about the *gun-powder* grains."

"Oh, that," Amanda said. "Uncle Jefferson was quite a gun nut and he has a target range in the basement. We were all down there this morning and took our turns at shooting. That explains the powder grains."

"Ah," I said. "A clever ploy. The murderer, realizing that he would be one of the suspects in a limited field of suspects, decided to cut down the odds against him by seeing to it that *all* of you would also have incriminating gun-powder grains on your hands. Now who was it who 'suggested' that all of you go down there and shoot?"

"Actually, it was Uncle Jefferson," Eldred said. "He always insists that we play with him. I would never go voluntarily. I hate guns."

I was only momentarily stymied. "And so one of you, knowing that *all* of you had been impregnated with gun-powder grains, decided to take advantage of that fact and shot your uncle."

"Possibly," Amanda admitted, "but hasn't it occurred to you that perhaps *none* of us committed the murder?"

I regarded her narrowly. "On the other hand, while only one of you may have committed the actual murder, this might very well

be a conspiracy in which all of you participated to some degree or another, including the act of getting gun-powder grains on all of your hands to confound the police."

"Nonsense!" Amanda said. "If this were a conspiracy, we would certainly see to it that we would all have mutually sustaining alibis for the time of the murder, whenever that was. But we don't. We wandered about the house and grounds all afternoon and I suppose that any one of us could have slipped into the study and shot Uncle Jeff."

I continued to close in. "I suppose that all of you are quartered in this house?"

"Just me," Amanda said. "Eldred has an apartment near the University. And Hercules is in the Air Force. He just got in this morning and we were having a sort of family gathering."

Hercules O'Leary nodded. "I'm stationed overseas. This is the first leave I've had in eighteen months."

"By the way," I said cleverly, "which one of you smokes Dromedary Filtertips?"

After reflection, Eldred O'Leary spoke up. "I do. But I really should stop."

I smiled grimly. "It is too late." I almost rubbed my hands. "I have deducted that just prior to shooting your Uncle Jefferson, the murderer gave him one of his own cigarettes and actually lit it for him." I pinpointed Eldred O'Leary with an official eye. "And that cigarette, sir, just happened to be a Dromedary Filtertip."

There were a few moments of stunned silence and then Hercules snapped his fingers. "By George, I just remembered. While it is true that Dromedary Filtertips are not *my* brand of cigarettes, when I arrived here this morning I found that I was out of my own favorites so Eldred graciously let me have a pack of his own."

Eldred blinked. "I did?"

"Of course," Amanda said firmly. "As a matter of fact, I too, just coincidentally, also ran out of my own brand of cigarettes and borrowed a pack of Dromedary Filtertips from you this morning. Don't you remember?" She turned on me with a magnificent smile. "So you see any one of us could have given Uncle Jeff that last cigarette."

She paused as a thought came to her, and then frowned. "Hold everything. Why are we talking cigarettes? Uncle Jeff didn't smoke any more. He quit the habit four months ago."

"Madam," I said, "perhaps under the stress of the moment he suddenly resumed. However, that is beside the point. And that point

is—from *whom* did he get that cigarette? He had no pack on his person nor was there any in the room—therefore I unerringly deduce that the cigarette *must* have been given to him by his murderer. There is no other possibility.”

I cogitated further on the matter while they respectfully watched. And then I had it. “But of course. He was trying to *tell* us something.”

“Tell us what?” Amanda asked appropriately.

“He was trying to tell us the *identity* of his murderer. He was telling us that his murderer was a man who did not know he had given up smoking.”

I turned my authoritative stare to Hercules O’Leary, the Air Force officer. “You, sir, were stationed overseas. You arrived here only this morning. It is obvious you were not aware that your uncle had stopped smoking. Therefore, when he realized that you were about to, or just might, do him harm to the extent of death, he requested a cigarette, which you generously provided for him under the impression that it was a perfectly legitimate last request. You lit the cigarette for him and he left it in the ashtray for us to find as a vital piece of evidence which clearly indicated that his murderer was someone who was not aware that he had quit smoking.”

Eldred now interposed. “I suddenly realized that I too didn’t know Uncle Jeff had quit smoking. I haven’t been in this house for over four months. I feel awfully guilty about that, but what with my teaching and working on my doctorate I just haven’t had the time.”

“That’s awful nice of you, Eldred,” Hercules acknowledged, “but it wasn’t necessary. I really *did* know that Uncle Jefferson had stopped smoking. He mentioned it in several of the letters he wrote to me. I have them in my luggage.”

I turned sternly on Eldred. “You have talked yourself into the noose, or at least life imprisonment, which is usually twelve years and three months. With your own words, you have publicly admitted that you are the only one here who didn’t know your Uncle Jefferson had stopped smoking.”

Eldred stroked his beard for inspiration. “Come to think of it, while I haven’t been in this house for over four months, I *did* have numerous phone conversations with Uncle Jeff. And he told me *often* that he had stopped smoking. However, my memory of that was temporarily blocked from my mind today because of Uncle Jeff’s murder and my feeling of guilt over my own inability to do the same. But yes, now I distinctly remember that Uncle Jeff told me he had stopped smoking.”

Amanda backed him immediately. "I was *here* when Uncle Jeff made the phone calls. He *did* tell Eldred that he had stopped smoking and he suggested that Eldred do the same."

I went to the window and stared up at the heavenly canopy. "Ralph, why are you just standing there doing nothing?"

"Come to think of it though," Amanda said, "I *do* know someone else who smokes Dromedary Filtertips. Wilbur Tuttle."

I definitely wasn't going to ask her who the devil is Wilbur Tuttle.

Nevertheless she continued. "He's Uncle Jefferson's financial advisor, attorney, and things like that. Uncle Jeff was beginning to have some doubts about him. He had suspicions that Wilbur might be dipping into the O'Leary capital."

Hercules O'Leary joined in. "You don't suppose Uncle Jeff and Wilbur had it out in Uncle Jeff's study this afternoon? And Uncle Jeff threatened to go to the authorities?"

I continued staring at the sky.

"And Wilbur panicked and grabbed one of the target pistols from the wall and shot Uncle Jeff?" Amanda suggested.

Likely story, I thought. What proof did they have? What evidence?

Eldred contributed. "Wilbur probably brought his car around the house and parked at the study-door wing. It rained this morning and there are muddy spots on that driveway. I'll bet his automobile tire-tracks are all over the road. If someone compared those tread marks with the tires on his car, I wouldn't be at all surprised if they were identical."

Hercules agreed. "And I'll bet Wilbur has gun-powder grains on his hands. And he doesn't even have a target range in his basement."

"His place is about a half mile down the road," Amanda said. "I can get you his address."

"All right, Henry," Ralph said, "let's ride over and ask Wilbur some questions."

Wilbur Tuttle was not at home when we reached his residence.

Accompanied by his attorney—and an overnight bag—he had turned himself in at police headquarters some twenty minutes earlier.

It was his story that he and Jefferson O'Leary had gotten into an argument. Tuttle had lost his head, grabbed the pistol from the cabinet, and slipped a cartridge into the chamber. What the argument had been about, he did not choose—on the advice of his attorney—to reveal at this time.

As for the cigarette, Tuttle had, during the argument, tapped one out of his pack for himself and put the pack on the table while he lit up. He had not offered O'Leary a cigarette because he knew O'Leary had given up smoking. Also, it did not seem like an appropriate moment to extend the courtesy.

However, it appeared that O'Leary had been under sufficient stress or anger to decide that the occasion was urgent enough for him to break his nicotine fast. He had helped himself to one of Tuttle's cigarettes and Tuttle had, of necessity—since O'Leary had no matches or lighter—to light it for him. And that cigarette had been resting in the ashtray a minute or so later when their argument reached its climax and Tuttle seized and loaded the gun.

Tuttle maintained that he had put the bullet into the gun merely to frighten O'Leary. The gun had gone off accidentally. He and his lawyer were positive of that.

After the deed, Tuttle had wiped his fingerprints off the gun and the spent cartridge and then, with his own cigarette still in his mouth, had fled to his automobile. He claimed that never for one moment had he considered trying to get away with murder. He simply wanted time to *think*, and also find a good lawyer. Tuttle's lawyer enthusiastically agreed with the wisdom of that.

That evening I was in my apartment swallowing the last two tablets in my vitamin-C jar when the phone rang. It was Amanda.

"Actually, your deduction about the murderer lighting Uncle Jeff's cigarette was absolutely correct. If it hadn't been for that vital, if tiny, fact, who knows but what Uncle Jeff's murder might *never* have been solved."

"Your words of commendation come too late," I said. "I have just swallowed the tablets. All that were in the bottle."

I hung up.

The phone began ringing again immediately.

I sat there smirking, I'm afraid. I would let it ring for three minutes and then answer.

The phone stopped ringing after one minute.

A sudden devastating thought occurred to me. Suppose she sent an ambulance?

I grabbed the telephone book—and discovered that the O'Leary residence was not listed. Damn it, I thought, isn't *anything* going to go right today?

I sat there, inclined to perspire, listening for the siren of an ambulance.

None came.

Instead Amanda appeared at my door in eleven minutes, quite breathless and worried.

I apologized immediately, and when she regained her composure—and her temper—we both had a glass of sherry.

That evening, among other things, we watched a mystery film on TV.

I confidently deduced that the victim's uncle was the killer.

I was wrong and had another sherry. A double.

"O"

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a **NEW** short story by

**ROBERT TWOHY**

*Elsewhere in this issue there is a light-hearted story by William Bankier, whose tales are sometimes very dark indeed. Here we have—be warned—a very dark tale from the often light-hearted Robert Twohy. Whichever view these versatile writers take, the results are always distinctive, sure, and potent . . .*

## SEVENTEEN

by **ROBERT TWOHY**

The phone rang. Rich was near it, getting a glass of water. He reached for the receiver on the wall. "Hello?"

"Can you meet me in twenty minutes at the S.P.?"

"Yeah, but you got a wrong number." He set it back on the hook.

His mother was at the table poking at her meatloaf, tired as usual. She worked at Charne's Bakery and at the end of the day she looked like she'd been steam-cleaned. She'd been sort of pretty, her marriage photos showed, but at forty-five her looks were gone—long gone.

He looked at her with contempt and some sadness. She worked hard and never gave him a bad time and in a while she'd be dead and her life had never had any bright spots. She might just as well have skipped it.

His wouldn't be like that. His was going to be movement, thrills, money, girls, laughs, music, danger. "Life is a banquet." He'd read or heard that somewhere. "Taste everything!" He meant to.

He had \$160 in his pocket. He stretched back in his chair to reach in and feel the wad.

It wasn't all his. In fact, most of it wasn't. Seventy-five percent

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of it would go to Don. Which meant that \$40 was his. Not bad for a few hours' work—when you're seventeen.

In fifteen minutes he'd be at the dark end of the S.P. depot and Don's big silver-grey Buick would slide up. They'd ride somewhere and he'd hand Don the money, and Don would give him his cut and a plastic bag, which he'd shove in his jacket. In the next few days, he'd sell the stuff and have more money for Don, meaning a new cut for him to put under his rug. His mother never went in his room.

How much was under the rug now? He hadn't counted in a couple of weeks. The last count had totaled \$716. So he must have \$900 or so now.

He finished his meatloaf, then carried his plate to the sink. "I guess I'll go out for a while."

"All right, dear. Will you bring back some ice cream?"

"Sure."

"I think there's some money in my purse."

"I have some money." She gave him \$5 spending money each Monday.

"Well, I'll pay you back. Bring peppermint, will you, dear? I've always liked peppermint."

"Sure." Rich thought, Great life, when the high point of the day is a dish of peppermint ice cream.

It wasn't her fault she'd got old, but it was that she'd given up and sunk to the bottom years ago, when she still had looks and some pep. Now all she could do was puddle around in the mud.

Well, he hadn't taken after her—except for looks. His face was thin like hers and he had her brown eyes and soft brown hair. But his feelings weren't hers, he knew that—they must be from his father.

His father had taken off when Rich was three. The marriage photos showed a short, broad guy with sharp eyes and a cocky smile.

Rich had that smile. He'd worked on it. He wasn't short and broad but he had his father's smile.

In his room, he got his long canvas jacket and from the bottom desk drawer his buck knife in its sheath, which he clipped to his belt, left side. The blade was six inches long but didn't show unless he flipped the jacket back. Which sometimes he did if he wanted to show he was carrying a buck knife. He didn't wear it at school. But walking around town or meeting somebody to deal, he carried it. For protection. And because he liked to. A buck knife made you someone.

"I'll be back in an hour or so."

"All right, dear." She gave a sad yawn, and shook her head. "I get so sleepy these days."

When she died, who'd know the difference?

Don drove north on the El Camino. Relaxing back in his seat, Rich glanced at him, thinking how smooth he looked. His dark jacket, his styled dark hair, the gold chain on his left wrist, his rough-grain shoes, his two rings that winked with their own light when his slim hands moved.

He was a class guy. Rich had learned a lot from him and would learn more. He'd learn all there was to learn.

"Where we going?"

"I'll pull in here."

Only a few cars were in the restaurant's wide parking lot. It wasn't a dope joint—it was a family place. Rich knew all the dope joints on the El Camino between Palo Alto and South City—he'd learned them from Huntington. On a working afternoon or evening he'd put some packets from the plastic bag in his pockets, take the bus to one or another of the joints, and hang around.

Don lit a cigarette, after shaking the pack at Rich, who turned it down. His mother said smoking was a dirty habit—but the reason she'd never smoked was that she had a weak throat, which he'd inherited. When he smoked his throat went tight and he had to cough or spit up.

He'd like to smoke. Don looked good, sending a sheet of smoke through his teeth when he talked, and the way the long filter cigarette rested between his two fingers was smooth and casual. Rich was practicing when he was alone, and getting better. Sometimes he could get down six drags before his throat tightened. It was just a matter of time before he'd be a smoker.

As he pulled out the wad of money Don said, "Keep it."

"Huh?" Rich wasn't sure he'd heard right.

"Keep it." Don smiled. "You've done good."

"Wow." It was Rich's first bonus. He shook his head slow, to show he really appreciated it. "Thanks, Don."

"Sure, pal. What do you do with your money? It's none of my business, but—"

"I'm saving it."

"Not in a bank, I hope."

"No. Under the rug in my room."

"Safe place?"

Rich nodded.

"You thinking of a stake, for when you move out?"

Rich nodded.

"You must have quite a chunk now."

"About a grand."

"Hey!" Don looked at him with his bright dark eyes and his smile.

Rich felt a jab of regret that no one from school could see him right now. Sitting in Don's big car with Don smiling at him like that—

No one knew where he got his stuff. They probably thought it was from a scabby creep he met in some tenement. He'd never let on about Don.

Don had warned him about that at the beginning, three months ago. He'd looked at him and said, "You don't know where I live, my phone, my real name, what I drive, or what I look like—okay?"

"Okay," Rich had agreed.

They were sitting in the Buick up at the Vista Point on the Sky-line. It was the first time Rich had been in the car. He was in the front seat. In the back was Huntington, who was graduating mid-term and had brought Rich to meet his boss.

Huntington and Rich had been fairly good friends in grade school, but they hadn't seen each other much in high school. Then four months ago Huntington had started getting friendly with him again, and after a while had told him what he was doing and showed him the money he was making. They'd done a little dope together—Rich's first time. Then Huntington had taken him around to show how he dealt. It was scary at first, but exciting too. Rich had got the feeling then that he was on the edge of big changes.

Soon after that Huntington had said that his boss wanted to talk to Rich about maybe moving into Huntington's job when he graduated. He said the boss was sending him to a city in the Southeast to learn the ropes down there.

"What'll you be doing?"

"I don't know yet, but he says it's the right spot for me." Huntington grinned his gappy grin. He was keyed up for it. Pulling out of town would be no problem—the uncle he lived with wouldn't know he was gone, or care.

"What city?"

"Atlanta, I think."

Sitting beside Don that first day, Rich, though his throat had

gotten tight, thought he was making a good impression. He'd thrown a glance back and Huntington had given an encouraging smirk.

They had talked about details of the job, most of which Rich knew pretty well already. Then Don had nodded, smiled, and said, "I think we'll get along fine."

And they had. And after he got home tonight Rich would have \$160 more for his stake.

Don had been quiet, smoking and looking out the side window. Rich asked, "How's Huntington doing?"

Don was still glancing around. He'd do that casually, making sure everything looked okay. "Real good."

"He was going to write me, but he hasn't yet."

"Just as well. He's supposed to settle in first."

Rich didn't understand that but there was no reason he should. And he wasn't going to start asking questions, like what city was Huntington in, or what kind of work was he doing. Whatever Don thought he should know he'd tell him.

"I don't have any stuff for you tonight. But I'll want you tomorrow night." Don leaned over to put his cigarette out in the ashtray. Rich had never seen him toss a cigarette out the window.

"Best thing with competition is to stop it before it's set. When someone starts pushing in, you want to persuade him to move to another neighborhood—you follow?"

Rich didn't, but he had an idea—mostly from Don's tone, which was smooth but with an edge to it. Rich saw that he was rubbing his forefinger along his pants, and stopped it.

"I want you to see how things happen."

Rich was quiet.

"What are you thinking?"

Rich said slowly, "That you're going to lean on somebody, and I should watch it—and you want to watch *me*. To see how I'll take it."

Don let out a breath. "I knew you were bright." He blew smoke. "Ask questions if you want."

"Who is he?"

"No one you know."

"Just you and me?"

"No—a friend of mine. You won't have to do anything."

"What'll happen?"

"We'll take him somewhere and do a little reasoning with him."

He'll catch on quick, I think. In a couple of weeks he'll be as good as ever—but in a different town, we expect."

Rich thought of himself watching a guy get beat up. Would he keep his cool?

It was a test. Don had moved Huntington up and now it was Rich's turn to show if he had what Don was looking for.

"What time?"

"Ten o'clock—S.P. It won't be this car. Look for an old white Galaxie, red top, four-door station wagon. The guy will be driving—I'll be in back. A big guy with a hat and a mustache will be in front with the guy. You come over and get in the back."

Rich nodded.

"Do you have your knife on you?"

Rich was surprised. He flipped his jacket back.

Don smiled. "You always carry it, don't you?"

"Well, no—not at school."

"Can I see it? The sheath too?"

Puzzled, Rich unclipped it and handed it to him. He watched Don slide the knife out, heft it, then turn the sheath over. "Initials, huh? Why?"

Rich shrugged. "I dunno. It was pretty dumb. If somebody stole it, they'd just black it over."

Don smiled. "You think somebody's going to steal it off your belt?"

Rich shrugged again, feeling silly. "I guess I just felt—like initialing it."

"Sure. Like you're proud to own it. Why not?" Don passed back the sheath and watched Rich clip it to his belt. "Ever use it?"

"No."

"Do you think you could?"

"What? If I had to? I think so, yeah."

"Do you know the word *potential*?"

"Sure."

"That's what Huntington has. You too."

Rich felt pride, and pleasure—and heat in his face. He hated blushing, it was a kid thing, like being not able to smoke. But he'd grow out of kid things—it was just a matter of time. And he had Don to learn from.

Don drove back to the S.P. and Rich walked the three blocks home and started for his room. Passing his mother's dark room, she asked, "Is that you, dear?"

"Yes."

"Did you bring the ice cream?"

"What?"

"Did you bring the peppermint ice cream?"

"Did you ask me to?"

"I thought I did. Well, it doesn't matter."

"If you did, I'm sorry."

"I probably didn't. I probably just thought I did. Goodnight, dear."

"Goodnight."

"Are the doors locked?"

"I'll check the back."

"There's so much crime these days."

Rich remembered the peppermint ice cream as he got to his room. Well, he hadn't lied—he hadn't remembered she'd asked, that was all—he had other things on his mind.

He closed the door and spread the flattened bills around among the other bills under the rug. When he turned the rug back some slight bulges showed, but you had to know something was under there to notice. He got the bed pulled out and stood looking out the window, wondering how it would be tomorrow night—how he'd act, watching a man get beat up. Would he keep his cool?

Runkel, the sick-looking freak with the boils, breathed at Rich in the courtyard. "Tell me where. I got forty dollars." They all knew Rich never carried at school.

"Not today."

"Man, I'm needing!"

"Few days maybe." Rich walked away.

He wondered what Runkel would think if he knew what Rich had going tonight. He wondered what all of them would think.

"Hi, Rich."

"Oh. Hi."

She stood and kind of shifted her feet. She didn't know what to say and he didn't help her. He just looked at her, feeling nothing and letting her see that. "I guess I better get to class," she said finally. "So long."

"Yeah."

He eased across the court, thinking how it had been with them last term. He'd really liked her. He'd taken her to shows—they'd bused up to the City once, to the zoo, then to the beach. She was his first girl—almost. They hadn't made it all the way but he hadn't pushed very hard—she wasn't the type and neither was he, then.

But he'd liked being with her. It had been a good term, and he'd done better in class than he ever had. A lot better than now. Not that he gave a damn, and his mother never asked.

Last term. Then Huntington had started hanging around with him.

Myra had asked, "Are you doping with him?"

"No." He'd just started. It had been good but he hadn't gone nuts with it. Even now, with all he could want, he didn't use much—just once or twice a week, and light. Not nearly like Huntington. Before pulling out, he'd really been using. It wouldn't hurt you though, he'd said—not if you stay on top of it. Rich guessed he was right. Only jerks and psychos got caught up.

Myra had said, "He's dealing, isn't he? Young guys get mixed up in that and they don't know what they're into."

"Did your dad tell you that?" She often quoted her dad, who was a C.P.A. Rich took a swig of his orange drink. They were in the caf.

"Yes, and it's true. They're mixing with adult criminals, who'll use them. And if there's trouble—"

"What trouble?" What did she know? Who was she? Pretty, a little on the chubby side, B-average, hoped she'd get into U.C.—big deal. She was no one and nowhere. "If Huntington gets busted, he'll be out next day—what trouble?"

"I'm not talking about jail."

"What are you talking about?"

"I don't want you hurt."

Rich had laughed—"Who's going to hurt me? Huntington? Why?"

She said, soft, "You're so naive."

Which was to laugh—*she* telling *him* that! Smiling his father's smile, shaking his head, he'd got up and walked away.

He hadn't talked to her much since—just a few words, like today. No more trips to the City, no more movies, no more kissy-face—no more superthrills like that.

He stopped, turned, watched Myra going up the steps of the school, and thought, cute—cute hair, cute figure, all cute, sweet kid stuff. He'd moved on.

But he hadn't yet tried for another girl.

Don had asked about girls. "You don't have a girl, do you?" They were at the Vista Point again, two months ago.

Rich shook his head. He had heat in his face. He looked at his finger, tracing a design, or rather no design, on his pants. He dreaded

what Don might ask next. Don did. "Have you ever had a girl? I mean, *had* a girl?"

"What?"

"You heard me." Don was smiling.

Rich's throat tightened and he coughed. He kept on and Don thumped him between the shoulders. Rich waved his hands, got out of the Buick, and ran over to the bushes, where he coughed up a lot of saliva and gradually got back to normal.

He wiped his lips and chin with a handful of leaves and came back, shaking his head, feeling like five cents' worth of catfood. Don didn't laugh. He got the car in gear and drove a while. Back toward town, he said casually, "I was nineteen when I had my first girl."

"Yeah?"

"Fact. I'm thirty-three now and don't regret waiting." He wasn't bragging, Rich thought, and was grateful. Don wasn't only a smooth guy and a class guy, he was a nice guy. "Anyway, it's better this way. For now. Girls are curious—they want to find out things. Who you know, where you go, et cetera. They're clever too—cleverer than you. So be a loner for now."

Rich knew from the way some girls looked at him that they were interested. At dope meets some of them let him know they wouldn't mind if he made some move. He was good enough looking, he guessed, and had money and a prestige job. He carried a buck knife—

But he let things pass. That was how Don wanted it, for now, and it made sense.

After school, he went home and thought of using, to kill time, but didn't, deciding that not to would prove to himself he wasn't all tensed up about tonight.

When his mother came dragging home, they had tomato soup and toasted cheese sandwiches and she'd brought some peppermint ice cream. He thought of Myra for some reason. He fiddled with the bowlful she brought him, then when she was droning about some nothing thing that had happened at the bakery he got up and washed it down the sink.

—And got a weird feeling as he watched the pink slime wash down—like—

Like what? Like he was sorry? Like he'd done something wrong or something? —Wow! What kind of kid thought was *that*!

It was past 7:30. He went in and turned on the TV. In a while his mother came in and they watched a cop-show rerun. She fell asleep

in her chair. He sat on, not seeing what he was watching. —Where would they go? How would the guy take the beating?

What had the guy done? Something about competition? It didn't matter. Don knew his business and if he thought the guy rated being beat up, that was it—that's what would happen.

Was the guy tough? Might Rich have to help? Was that another reason Don wanted him along—for backup? Was that why he'd asked if Rich would be able to use his knife?

No, that was silly. Don had said he'd be there just to watch. And to *be* watched. Don was interested in him. He was in business, a businessman. He needed helpers, bright young guys to train—cool guys like Huntington, like himself.

He must have given Huntington a test, liked how he handled himself, and moved him up—to learn new ropes in Atlanta. How Rich handled himself tonight could mean his future.

It was 9:45. He got up. His mother stirred and groaned. He said, "I'm going out."

"All right, dear." She blinked around. "What time is it?"

He told her.

"Where are you going?"

"To a show. I told a guy I'd meet him."

"Oh. Do they start shows this late?"

"Tonight they do." He strung out a lie about an all-night horror bill at the Laurel in San Carlos. "We may only stay for a couple—maybe only one." He didn't know how long it would take to beat up the guy. "Or I might be out real late. But it's Friday so I can sleep all tomorrow if I like."

"That's true. Do you have enough money?"

"Yes." \$20-plus in his pocket and over a grand under the rug.

"Do you want another dish of ice cream?"

"No, I'll get going."

"Be careful, dear. Late at night there's all sorts of violent people."

He went to his room, got his knife, clipped it on his belt, and put on the canvas jacket. He looked in the mirror and turned his head various ways, face set in a cool look.

He had a thought. After tonight he'd probably look older. A lot older, at least nineteen. He flashed on girls, foxy girls—

Yes, he thought, he was moving on—growing up, putting kid stuff behind him. His future was going to be girls, lots of girls. Cars, clothes, money, power—a life in the fast lane.

He went in and said, "Goodnight, Mom."

As she turned up to him he thought, She was young once and must have had dreams and hopes too. But they had died and now she just puddled along, not bothering him or anyone else, not complaining about the lousy ways life, his father, Mr. Charne, or he himself treated her, as someone who didn't count for anything. For a crazy moment he had an urge to grab her and yell, "I do love you, Mom—really!"

But he didn't because tonight more than any night he had to know he was tough and cool. But he bent and brushed her cheek with his lips.

She touched her cheek and said in a surprised voice, "Why, thank you, dear."

He turned quickly and walked out and down the block, angry at the feelings he had, because they were what turned you into a wimp, a nobody—like Myra, with her big eyes and her soft mouth.

The teacher asked, "Where are we going?"

"Not much further."

They had gone up to 280 and south, turned at Crystal Springs, and were now moving along the coast, Highway 1, out of Half Moon. It was dark, with only a slice of moon. Not much traffic.

Rich sat in back with Don. In front was the driver, who Rich thought of as the teacher, and beside him, in front of Rich, a big guy with a dark hat and a heavy black mustache. The car was in bad shape—the door on Rich's side rattled like it was ready to fall open. He'd looked for the lock button but it didn't have one. He sat toward the middle and listened to the door rattle and grinding noises from the rear. The floor was littered with old newspapers and wadded clothes and other junk. The guy was a slob.

He was pale and had a thin skull with thin grey hair pasted across it, a long beak and wrinkled little eyes shoved up close to it. He wore a thin grey gabardine coat.

"How much further?" the big man in front asked. He wore an old jacket with lumpy shoulders. He'd glanced up when Rich had crossed from the S.P. to the Ford, but that was all Rich had seen of his face, which was broad and puffy. All he'd seen of him since were the shoulders and the thick black hair under the hat.

"About five miles," Don said.

The station wagon hadn't showed until almost 10:30. Rich had been considering going home, figuring that maybe things had been

called off. Then it had rolled in and he'd walked over to the back door on the passenger side and gotten in.

Don had given him a quick smile but said nothing. The driver had glanced back without any interest. Don must have told him a story about Rich coming along that made sense to him.

A block from the S.P. Don had reached over and lifted Rich's jacket. Rich looked at him, surprised. Don gave a little shrug and a smile, and looked out the window. Rich got a sudden jolt—was he going to be told to use his knife to maybe threaten the guy?

But Don had said it was just a beating.

But could it be, maybe, like an initiation for him—like *blooding* him, like when hunters or somebody are blooded they're not kids any more? Was Rich supposed to *stick* the guy, take a little blood from him? Could he do that if Don told him to?

He realized he was breathing hard, and looked at his forefinger tracing a squiggle on his leg. He stopped it. Don hadn't noticed—he was still looking out the window. He wasn't dressed sharp tonight. Old slacks, old shoes, a nothing jacket. It figured.

Rich thought, Just take it easy—just keep cool. His hard breathing slowed. No reason to tense up. Whatever Don wanted done, he'd tell him. And Rich would do it. He knew that. It was the way it would be. It was his future.

The driver wasn't really a teacher. Or maybe he was. Anyway, he *looked* like a teacher, the kind you don't like—fussy and worried, hating teenagers and hating being a teacher. He'd get beat up, but not really hurt. Maybe even cut a little if that was Don's idea—

They passed the turnoff to Pescadero. Don said, "A couple of miles more."

"I wish you'd said it was this far."

"Why?"

"I'd have filled up. The gauge shows less than a quarter." He shook his head and gave a fretful sigh, like a teacher who knows no one's listening. "Why couldn't he meet us in town?"

Don said in his quiet voice, "Out here's where he said."

"We should have used your car, then."

"I told you—it's in the shop."

"Then we should have used his—" he nodded toward the man next to him. "It's better than mine. That bearing might freeze up."

"We'll hope not." Don smiled at Rich, like including him in the cool way he was handling the complaints. Rich smiled back.

"Turn here," Don said. They were coming up to a narrow paved road on the left, without a sign. The driver turned into it.

"This is a hell of a road." He had slowed. The station wagon rattled as it dipped into pits in the pavement.

"It's private," Don told him. In the dark Rich could see a spread of fields, without houses. "Farmers don't live along here—they live in town and come out to work the fields."

"I don't care what they—hey!" The teacher was staring big-eyed in the rearview mirror. "A car's behind us!"

Rich turned and saw headlights. He looked at Don, who had glanced back and said calmly, "It's him."

The teacher let out a big breath. He slowed more. "Shall I pull over?"

"Go a little further. There's a wide place. Swing around and park."

The headlights behind had come within thirty feet and stayed there. Rich saw the driver lick his lips.

"You sure it's him?" the teacher said in his whiny way.

"You're nervous," Don told him.

"Yeah. We come all this way. I'm thinking of gas, and getting back up some of those hills."

"Pull over here."

It was dirt and gravel and dead leaves, with hanging trees around, some of the branches brushing the Ford as they turned in.

The car behind stopped behind a bend about forty feet back. In the dark and with the angle, Rich couldn't make out the shape. It might be a Torino.

The teacher cut the motor and the lights. He turned to look back at the other car but its motor and lights were out now too.

"Is he going to come over, or do we walk back there?"

"He'll come here," Don said.

The teacher straightened around in the seat, reached inside his overcoat, and pulled out a thick white envelope.

Don had bent and brought out something from under the back seat—something wrapped in a dark towel. He held it in both hands in his lap. As Rich looked, the towel fell away from around it and it was a shotgun—sawed off and ugly—with a curved metal handle and two wide, short barrels, horizontal. Their ends were three inches from the back of the teacher's head.

The teacher looked up at the mirror. Rich heard his gasp and his wrinkled eyes were big and shiny. "Don? What—"

"Just reach, Phil."

He did, still with the thick envelope in his left hand, both hands half closed like skinny claws, his arms shaking. "Don?"

He grunted as the big guy next to him moved his hands fast, pushing them inside his coat and coming out with a blunt black pistol. Don flipped the towel around the shotgun again and laid it back under the seat. The big guy held the pistol aimed at the driver's face.

Don pulled the envelope from the driver's left claw.

The car in the road behind them sat there, no one getting out of it.

"Don, are you robbing me? Is this a robbery? If it is, okay—I give it to you. I mean, I give it to you. I—"

"You're babbling, Phil."

"Yeah, Don, I'm doing that. That's what I'm doing. —I don't want to die, Don. I mean, I don't want to die. I never done anything, nothing at all. I been straight, I don't know what you heard but it's a lie. I never—"

"Too bad, Phil." Rich had never heard that tone from Don. It was flat, no tone at all. "Too much babbling."

Rich thought, It's not a beating, it's a killing. That's the test. That's why he brought me. Both forefingers were tracing on his pants and his mouth was open. He was sucking air and felt his throat tightening, but, damn, he wouldn't go off on a choking fit, he wouldn't. He didn't like the guy anyway. He was a fussy old school-teacher and a slob and—

If I do good I'll be *really* in with Don. If I don't, I'll be nowhere with him.

He closed his mouth and his eyes and concentrated on breathing slow. As his throat began to untighten, he told himself, I'm over the worst of it, I'll be all right. I've come through, I'm in control now.

He felt a tug at his waist and looked. Don had pulled out his knife. The guy in the passenger seat quickly switched the gun from his right hand to his left and reached for the knife with his free hand.

Phil looked at the knife and at the gun. He whispered, "What now? What now?"

The big guy swung his shoulders, pulling the gun back and driving the knife forward into Phil's thin grey coat.

Phil screamed and Rich jerked forward as the knife, shiny red, was pulled out of him.

Phil thrashed against the wheel screaming. Rich saw blood come out his mouth and run down his chin. He looked at Don.

Don nodded to the big guy. The guy hit Phil again, higher up his coat. Phil flopped a claw at the door handle as the hit knocked him into it and the door flew open. He screamed again and fell backward out of the car, his legs still in. Rich raised up and saw his legs twist and kick around, then pull away outside.

Through the open door, Rich saw him rise up and stagger, hunched over, into the thick part of a branch, and go down. He lay on his side, seemed to bunch himself to try to get up, then stretched out. Arms straight over his head, he rolled on his back. Rich saw the pale glow of his face. There was no movement and no more sound.

Don got out. He walked over to Phil and looked down at him.

Rich wanted to go over to Don, but his legs didn't have any muscles. Still, though he had seen a man stabbed twice, his hands were only shaking a little and he had kept in control. His mouth was open and he was breathing fast, but his throat wasn't tightening.

The gun still in his left hand, the big guy was holding Rich's knife blade down so the blood dripped from it to the floor. Rich noticed for the first time that he was wearing thin black gloves. The guy looked at him. The black mustache curved. "You did all right."

Don was still standing outside looking down at Phil.

A long drop of blood fell from the point of the knife.

Don turned and walked back to the waiting car. There he stopped and stood talking to the driver.

Rich pushed his feet against the floor and felt the muscles back in his legs. Phil was a long dark mound lying out on the ground, his face a pale shine at the far end. Rich wanted Don to see how he was. The big guy had said he'd done all right. "I'll go take a look," he said. He'd look down at Phil and Don would come over and they'd look down at him together.

"Better stay."

Rich sat back. He guessed they didn't want beginners walking around. He looked out the open front door at the lump that was Phil. Then the motor of the other car started and the low beams came on. Don started back to the station wagon. The car moved slowly ahead—a Torino, all right. It moved forward until it was even with the station wagon, then stopped. The motor went off and the lights went out. The driver was just part of the dark.

Rich asked the guy who was still holding his knife, "Are we going back in that car?"

"Sure."

"Leave this one here, huh?"

"Don't worry about it."

Rich got a jolt in his chest. Why had they used his knife? Why not the shotgun or the pistol? Or if they didn't want the noise of a gunshot, why hadn't they brought their own knife? Was it so he'd be part of the kill? Was it his bleeding—using his knife?

He was sucking in air. The guy in front was smiling. Or maybe his thick mustache was cut so that in dim light it looked like he was smiling. But his eyes had a shine and didn't look like smiling.

Don climbed in back. He nodded to the guy, who opened his door and got out.

Rich said to Don, "Did you use my knife so I'd be blooded?"

"Sure." It was a flat sound.

Rich's door was pulled open. The guy, the gun still in his left hand, grabbed around Rich's shoulder and pulled hard. Rich yelled and almost fell in the gravel and dirt. The guy held him from falling, then pushed him into the open front door and seat. Rich yelled as his legs were kicked. He pulled them in and the door was pushed shut behind him.

He saw the blood on the floor. He saw black-gloved hands reach over the seat and lay folded newspapers on the blood puddled on the vinyl seat on the driver's side. Don was back there so they were his hands, his gloves. Rich pulled himself up and as he looked back he saw Don reach under his seat. He yelled as the two holes of the shotgun came toward him.

He had a flash on Myra. "*You're so naive.*"

He flashed on a bowl of ice cream, his mother's face above it, smiling at it.

He wanted to yell, "I *do* love you, Mom!" but couldn't because he started coughing.

The guy's voice was saying, "Take it." He was in the driver's seat, sitting on the newspapers. He was handing the knife to Rich, handle first.

So it was all right. Don must have felt he had to test him this way. The guy wouldn't give him back his knife if they were going to kill him, would he? Don wouldn't kill him. Why would he? He hadn't babbled.

He took the knife and tried to smile at Don and tell him he got it, it was his bleeding, and how had he done?—but the words wouldn't come and he couldn't see Don. All he could see were the two holes of the shotgun at his face.

His throat went tight, his head ducked, and he jerked forward in

a cough. The first bullet from the pistol missed. The second smashed him behind the left eye and went through his brain, leaving the hole a .38 cartridge makes going out. He fell over to the right, his head on the armrest, his face empty and his eyes staring, not cool, not anything.

Don took the thick envelope from his jacket, extracted five or six bills from it, and dropped two of them over the front seat. One fell on the kid's leg and the other drifted to the floor. The others he wadded and pushed into the kid's half open left hand. The knife had dropped from the right hand that stuck straight down from the shoulder and hung a few inches over the floor.

The big man had walked away from the station wagon and squatted by the dead man. Putting the .38 in the right hand and molding the fingers around it, he took the index finger and pressed it on the trigger. Then he pulled the gun away by the barrel and walked back to the station wagon.

Don had put the envelope of money back in his jacket and taken out a plastic bag full of small packets. He ripped it open and flipped it over the front seat, some of the packets spilling around, most staying in the bag that fell on the floor in the blood.

Don leaned over the front seat, flipped the kid's jacket up, lifted the sheath, and rubbed both sides of it with his gloved hands. Then he sat back and rubbed the door handle and here and there on the door—opened it, got out, and rubbed the outside handle.

The big man had been standing by the open front door watching him. Don stopped rubbing and the man said, "Anyplace in particular?"

"No, just drop it." He watched the man lean in the car and drop the .38 on the floor on the driver's side. He reached in the back door, got the shotgun in the towel, and closed the door. The other man gathered the newspapers from the front seat and they walked together to the Torino, leaving the front door of the station wagon open.

Don walked around the car and got in front, sliding the shotgun under the seat. The other man came up to the driver, a brown-haired young woman with soft features, and got the keys from her. He opened the trunk and put the wad of newspapers in, closed the trunk, came back and returned the keys to her, and got in the back seat.

She switched on the motor and the lights and took off in a spurt.

She drove north on 1, not too fast, and the men smoked and were quiet. She turned inland at Half Moon and started up the grade.

Ten minutes later she turned north on 280. Ten minutes later she turned east and started down the San Bruno hill.

Don had been looking out the window, with a little frown. Now he reached to put out his cigarette in the ashtray and nodded. "Yeah. That'll do it."

She glanced at him. "What?"

"Be a shame if she missed it."

"If who missed what?"

He shook his head and smiled. "The kid told me he'd hid his money under the rug in his room. I was thinking you could call his mother."

"Me? Why?"

"So she'd get the money. Put on a little voice, tell her you were a classmate of his and he'd told you he'd tucked some money under the rug, and you thought she should know. That's all, just tell her that."

"Won't she ask who I am?"

"Just say it doesn't matter, she should just look under the rug."

He glanced at the man in back, who shrugged, meaning it was nothing to him.

The woman said slowly, "All right. If you want me to."

He nodded. "Not tomorrow, not for a few days. But she should get the money."

She thought it was a nice thing to do. And typical of him. He was hard at times, but to get anywhere you have to be, and he didn't like to hurt anyone, he only did when he had to—and underneath he was a truly caring person.

She reached for his hand and squeezed it and smiled, and he smiled back. They rode north on the El Camino like that, hand in hand.



a **NEW** espionage story by

**ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS**

*The life of a spy. The danger and excitement—the disillusionment and the loneliness. The imperative to think and act on one's feet, to never fully trust anyone or to sleep. There are a number of writers we can trust to evoke the elusive world of political intelligence and intrigue. John le Carré, Eric Ambler, Graham Greene, Len Deighton, Ken Follett, Frederick Forsyth, Alistair MacLean, Helen MacInnes, Gavin Lyall. . . In these pages, Michael Gilbert, Patricia McGerr, Edward D. Hoch, Jeffry Scott, and Robert Edward Eckels. But one has to wonder if spinning a spy story such as the one that follows isn't almost as difficult as actually being one . . .*

## **THE KAPALOV PROPOSAL**

by **ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS**

The first thing that struck me was the heat. It had been a long time since I'd been back and I'd forgotten how hot a Washington summer could be. Fortunately, the limo in from the airport was air-conditioned and so was the hotel. But I made a mental note anyway to get some clothes that were more suitable for the climate—assuming, that is, that I'd be staying long enough to need them.

All Giddings had told me was that I was wanted back in Langley "soonest." Giddings is CIA controller in Berlin, which makes him my boss, and he usually has a good reason for wanting me to do things—although it goes without saying that his perception of what is good and/or desirable frequently differs from mine. This time, though, when I asked him all he did was smile and twist the pencil

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he was constantly toying with lightly between his thumbs and forefingers.

"They'll tell you when you get there," he said.

Which meant, of course, that they hadn't told him either. But just the same he was right. Sooner or later somebody would have to tell me something, and with that in mind I began to unpack.

Ten minutes later the phone rang. It was Jacobsen telling me he was on his way up.

I'd known him before, of course—first in Austria when he was running a net into Czechoslovakia and a couple of the other southern satellites, and then later in Berlin where he was Giddings' predecessor as controller. From there he'd moved on to Southeast Asia, somehow emerging from that quagmire with his reputation intact. The last I'd heard he had been appointed something fairly high in internal security at Langley. In any case, he was a little balder now than I remembered him, and plumper. But he still had the same petulant baby face and large pouchy eyes whose heavy lids drooped continually as if to hide the quick intelligence that lurked behind them.

"Welcome to the land of the big PX," he said. "This must all seem pretty strange to you. How many years has it been?"

"More than I like to remember. Things come back pretty quickly, though."

"Isn't that the truth? How's my friend Giddings doing these days?"

"Same as usual," I said. "I think he was a little disappointed when he wasn't on the list for Vietnam, but he got over that quickly enough when he saw how things were turning out over there."

"No silver lining within its cloud," Jacobsen said. "What did he tell you about this current caper—that it's the usual piece of cake?"

"Not quite," I said.

Jacobsen laughed. "No, I guess not. There's a big difference between sending somebody back to this country and getting them to slip behind the curtain to meet an agent who may or may not be who he says he is. Actually, though, that's all we want you to do here. Meet somebody."

"Who?"

"That's what we want you to tell us." He looked at me quizzically.

"Ready?"

"Now?"

Jacobsen smiled. "Initial impressions are always the best. . ."

The Jefferson Memorial is on the wrong side of the tidal basin to be in the main tourist stream, but it gets its share and there were a scattering of people about when Jacobsen and I got there.

He paused at the top of the steps just inside the dome to take his pipe from his jacket pocket and ostentatiously begin to fill it.

He hadn't brought me there just for the view, of course, and in any case there's no smoking in any of the monuments. "What happens now?" I said.

"That depends. See anybody you know?"

At first I didn't, but then I spotted a lightly built man moving slowly around the rotunda, seemingly engrossed in the inscriptions around the top. Like me he was wearing a suit that was just a little too bulky and heavy for the climate. I nodded to indicate him. "That the one?"

"If you know him, yes."

"His name's Juri Kapalov," I said. "At least that's what he was calling himself at the time. That would have been five or six years ago—he was working as a chauffeur for the Soviet Embassy in Brussels."

"Now he says he's a major in the KGB."

"Could be," I said. "He was a captain then. I was playing an Air Force sergeant with secrets to sell—on the assumption that if we could find out what they wanted to know we'd know where they were weak—and Kapalov was supposedly just a flunky sent out to pass on messages. Although I wouldn't bet I fooled him any more than he fooled me."

"Nor would I," Jacobsen said. "Because, you see, it was Kapalov who suggested we bring you over to verify his bona fides." He put his unlighted pipe back in his pocket. "Let's go," he said.

"And that's it?"

"For the moment," Jacobsen said.

We drove down to a small restaurant across the bridge in Arlington.

Not surprisingly, Kapalov was already there waiting for us in a back booth.

"Were you followed?"

"Of course not," Jacobsen said. "There's no reason we should have been."

"No? Perhaps not. But you checked anyway."

"Of course."

"Good. So did I. But then I have perhaps more to lose than you." He smiled faintly. "It's been a long time, my friend," he said to me. "I hope you don't mind my calling you my friend. After all, we are professionals and what our jobs require us to do shouldn't be allowed to impact on our personal relations. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Sure," I said. "As long as you can tell where the job ends and the personal begins."

Kapalov's smile broadened. "Granted," he said. "But perhaps I can ease your mind with evidence of my good faith. You have in your organization what I believe your allies the British call a mole—a highly placed official who is really one of ours."

"That's hardly news," Jacobsen said.

"No, you've known it since Golitsyn defected last year. But what Golitsyn couldn't tell you was who."

Jacobsen took his pipe from his pocket and lit it thoughtfully. "And you can?"

Kapalov shook his head. "Not directly. I do know this, however. Unlike the Britisher Philby, this man was not ours from the beginning. He was corrupted by an agent he thought he was running, turned, and was carefully groomed and assisted to rise to his present position. The agent's code name is Alex."

"Golitsyn told us that too."

"But not who Alex is. That is *my* contribution."

"For what in return?"

"Assistance," Kapalov said. "The people in the Kremlin think Golitsyn is ripe to redefect."

"They can't be serious!"

"Why not?" Kapalov asked. "He was no ordinary defector. Look at him—the youngest staff colonel in the history of the Soviet Army. A man with a brilliant future. And then, as the result of a run-in with a superior whose only glimmer of intelligence was the sense to realize he ought to be jealous, he chucks it all and flees to the West. And for what? Six months of intensive debriefing by your military intelligence services and then, when every last drop of useful information has been drained from him, a quiet brushoff to a tract house in a dreary suburb, and an even drearier job translating documents in some obscure corner of your State Department. That must gall a man of his talents and intelligence like wormwood."

"My masters' idea, then, is that I approach him with the proposition that he agree to redeem himself by acting as our agent. Thus, in time, he can return as a hero and his whole defection can be

passed off as a clever plot to deceive the wicked capitalists. And, in fact, an important side benefit would be to discredit the information he gave you as the obvious lies of a planted agent. My superiors are convinced he'll jump at the chance."

"But you're not."

"Far from it," Kapalov said. "Golitsyn has his own peculiar code. As a point of honor, he took nothing from Russia but his brains, which he could hardly leave behind. He would do the same for you. Once returned, he would tell us what he knew but he would not spy or lie or cheat to achieve that return. He's not fool enough, however, to believe that we would honor any commitment or promise."

"It would be a different matter, though, if you were to urge him to cooperate as a double agent as a means of proving his loyalty to his new country and thereby qualifying himself for the kind of work for you that he did for us."

The Russian smiled. "I have no illusions, of course, that he would not in fact *be* a double agent. Still, I'm sure there would be enough good information mixed in with the bad to make his performance credible. And that, for my purposes, is good enough."

"And when Golitsyn eventually declines to return to Russia?" I said.

Kapalov continued to smile. "By then," he said, "I trust I shall have moved on to other, more important matters. And in any case I imagine you'll contrive to find a way to make it appear someone else's fault and not mine in any way. You see, I also have no illusions that this will be a one-time arrangement. Once we 'cooperate' I become your man for life. And I'm a young man. It's not inconceivable that I could become a general someday. All the more so since it would be to your interest as much as mine to see that my career prospered. All of us would benefit."

"So it would seem," Jacobsen said. He sat silently for a moment, cupping the bowl of his pipe in his hand. "I'll have to kick this upstairs, you know," he said at last.

"Of course," Kapalov said. "And so that *your* superiors will know that I can deliver what I promise, I'll give you Alex's name now. It's Victor Kolia. He left your service some years ago and is now living happily in retirement in Florida." He smiled and rose. "That's how much I trust you not to be so foolish as to turn me down. You know how to get in touch with me."

He went out. I noticed he left his check for Jacobsen to pay.

Macready sat with his hands clasped lightly in front of him on the big wooden desktop. He was a tall, spare man in his mid- to late-fifties with a thin patrician face and thinning blondish hair brushed impeccably back from a high forehead. He would never be Director, agency gossips said—too abrasive. Which meant he wouldn't play politics, office or otherwise. But he had come in back in the early Dulles years, and despite a lack of field experience—or perhaps because of it—had risen steadily if not spectacularly to become head of internal security and, those same gossips said, the one man the Director, whoever he was, always listened to.

Now he sat listening himself as Jacobsen outlined Kapalov's proposal. Finally he said:

"Do you trust him?"

Jacobsen made a show of getting out his pipe, filling and lighting it. "About as far as I can throw that desk," he said. "But that's prejudice rather than facts. And I have to admit that no intelligence agency in its right mind anywhere would jeopardize a highly placed mole just to plant a double of Kapalov's caliber. On the other hand, they may have written their man off already, figuring that once we knew he existed we were bound to ferret him out eventually, and are just making the best of a bad situation. The only way to find out for sure is to give Kapalov rope and see if he hangs himself."

"You assume then that he's telling the truth about Kolia being Alex."

"There's one way to find out," Jacobsen said. "Pull Kolia in."

"Perhaps," Macready said. "But I want no precipitate action—nothing that would cause Kolia or the mole to bolt. I want them both ready and waiting for the ax when it's ready for them. In the interim, there's the matter of this man Golitsyn. You debriefed him. Will he cooperate?"

"I think he could be persuaded," Jacobsen said. "Kopalov didn't lie about one thing anyway. Golitsyn is wasted where he is now. He knows it and so does everybody else. The problem is that the kind of work he'd really be competent at requires a security clearance, and, of course, no defector's ever going to get that because there's always that slight possibility he's really a double in disguise or someday will pull a double dutch and run back home to the motherland. Tell Golitsyn this is the way to get that clearance and, to coin Kapalov's phrase, he'll jump at it."

"Do so then," Macready said.

"And when it's time to deliver?"

"We'll worry about that when it's time to worry about that," Macready said. He looked coolly over at me. "So far," he said, "no one outside this room other than the Russians—defectors or otherwise—knows anything about any of these matters. It will stay that way."

"I understand."

"I'm sure you do. But for security's sake we must operate very much like the Mafia. Once in, you get out only when we decide to let you. Which will be when this mole business is settled for good and all."

Macready smiled briefly, without warmth. "I suggest you buy some summer suits. Otherwise I'm afraid you'll find the climate around here very uncomfortable. But then you've probably already realized that."

Golitsyn's home wasn't a mansion by any means, but it was hardly a tract house in a dreary suburb either. It was a pleasant split level on a quiet street with enough space between it and its neighbors to afford its occupant a fair degree of privacy whenever he wanted it—which, considering Golitsyn's circumstances, I suspected he usually did.

He sat on the sofa in the living room lighting a fresh cigarette from the stub of his previous one. "Always before," he said, "I have dealt with either the man Macready or his deputy Jacobsen. Why is it different now?"

"That's something you'd have to ask them," I said. "Maybe they thought a new face would attract less attention." Actually the reason was to give me a chance to form an independent judgment of Golitsyn the man—or at least that's what I had been told.

Golitsyn shook his head. "Pah! Why bother? They have contacted me at my work—or what they call my work—and told me I may speak freely with you." He laughed harshly. "As if that were not always my problem. I spoke freely in the Soviet Union and it led to my defection. I spoke freely here to your man Jacobsen and it led to what? This." He swept his hand around to indicate the room.

"I ask myself often how would it have been if I had said nothing. Not about the military and technical things—that they knew I knew. The other, though—that is not information that is usually shared with staff colonels. But X says something here and Y says something else there and a clever man can piece it together into a whole. And I thought if I show these Americans just how clever I am, then they

will really appreciate the prize they have in me. What I forgot is that only bearers of good news are rewarded and not always even then. There! Do I speak freely enough?"

I nodded.

"But that is not why you came, to hear me speak freely."

"No," I said. "We have information that the Russians believe you're ready to redefect."

"To return to the Soviet Union?" Golitsyn smiled sadly and shook his head. "No. That door was closed forever."

"They don't think you realize that," I said. "They plan to offer to let you earn your way back into their good graces by spying for them. We'd like you to pretend to go along with them."

Golitsyn looked up sharply. "Why?" he said. "So I can be your spy and tell them only what you want them to know?"

I nodded again. "I was told to tell you that if you did, you would afterwards be given a security clearance and allowed to do the kind of work you're qualified for."

Golitsyn's face sobered and he looked at me earnestly for a long moment. Then he leaned back against the sofa and laughed loudly. "A very revealing statement," he said. "You were told to say. Not 'you *will* be given.' Tell me, you who are so careful with your words—do you think they will keep their promise?"

I'd been lied to too often myself to lie now. Nor would I have fooled him if I had. "I don't know," I said.

"Nor do I," Golitsyn said, his face sobering again. "But what choice have I? I can't go back. Oh, they wouldn't shoot me as in the bad old Stalinist days. They've learned that much from you. Instead, they would parade me in triumph—the man who had been to the West and seen through it. What an object lesson to others who might be tempted to do as I had. Then, when my usefulness was at an end, I would be quietly shuffled off to obscurity."

"But neither can I stay as I am. Each week now the vodka bottle empties a little faster. Soon—" he shook his head "—soon I will no longer count or care. So what else can I do but plunge ahead and once more trust?"

I had no answer, and two weeks later he called me to report that Kapalov had contacted him and that they had arranged to meet that night in a shopping-center parking lot.

It wasn't the sort of spot a film director would have chosen for a spy thriller, but as meeting places go in the real world it wasn't a

bad choice—convenient, easy of access, and, more importantly, a place where both parties could easily have legitimate reasons for being. The only drawback was that the same crowd that Kapalov hoped to merge into would also effectively screen anybody who knew about the meet and took the precaution to show up early—which, of course, is what Jacobsen and I did, he ostensibly waiting his turn in a barbershop three stores down, me slouched unobtrusively in my car just beyond the reach of the lights.

Golitsyn arrived first, walking down the line of shops to stand finally before a lighted hardware store window as if contemplating a purchase. Twenty-five minutes later he was still there, still alone. But now his nervousness was obvious as he strained to prolong his cover beyond its reasonable span. He began to fidget, then pace. Finally when he could bear it no more, he turned and stepped off the curb to start back toward his car. As he did, a car motor roared to life at the far end of the lot. Reflexively my head swiveled toward the source of the sound. As a result I didn't see the figure dart out from the dark passageway between buildings, fire twice, then dart back—then, of course, it was too late.

"A setup," Jacobsen said bitterly. "A goddamn lousy setup."

I had been the first to reach Golitsyn. His eyes, I suppose, should have been reproachful, but they were merely dead. A crowd had begun to form, and since there was nothing more we could do for him—or to him—we had simply melted back into it and were long gone by the time the police arrived. It was later that same evening—or morning, rather, by now—and the three of us sat in Macready's office assessing the damage.

"Not necessarily," Macready said. "Not from the beginning anyway. It may simply be that someone on the other side tumbled to what Kapalov was up to and decided to take corrective action."

Jacobsen shook his head. "No," he said. "If that were the case, it would be Kapalov's body lying on that lot. Instead I suspect it won't be long before *Colonel* Kapalov turns up again on some plum assignment, his just reward for another dirty job successfully completed. And not much we can do about it either."

"So where does that leave us?" Macready said.

Jacobsen shrugged. "About where we were before," he said. "Although," he added thoughtfully, "I suppose on the positive side we can scratch Kolia off as a possible Alex. They'd never give up the

real name for an operation they planned to blow almost as soon as it got off the ground."

"Maybe that's what they want us to think," I said.

Macready looked at me sharply. "Do you have a reason for saying that," he said, "or is it just speculation?"

"Call it speculation with reason," I said. "But there are just too many things about this whole affair that don't add up. For one thing, what reason would the Russians have for wanting to kill Golitsyn after all this time? We'd already milked him for all he knew, and we sure as hell weren't using him effectively against them.

"I suppose it could have been for revenge or to prove to other would-be defectors that they'd never be safe no matter where they went. But then why go through all the mickey-mouse? From what Kapalov said, they knew where he was. Why not just cut him down as he left the house some morning? Why bring us in at all? Unless, of course, Golitsyn is just a smoke screen and the real purpose is something else."

"Such as?"

"Protecting the mole," I said. "And what better way than to give us the information we were after in such a way as to lead us to discredit it? At the very least, it would set us back months if not years. And by then who knows what other schemes they could have worked out to protect their man?"

"But then, of course, they'd have had to know we were aware of the mole's existence. And that's the other thing that doesn't add up. Golitsyn said it himself. It isn't the kind of information that's normally shared with staff colonels. For that matter, it isn't the kind of information that's normally shared with KGB field majors either.

"But the issue isn't how Kapalov knew. He could have stumbled on it inadvertently or pieced it together the same way Golitsyn had. The question is how he knew Golitsyn knew. How did *anybody* on the other side know? Obviously, they were told."

"That's impossible," Macready said. "Until you came in, only—" He broke off.

"That's right," I said. "Only you and Jacobsen knew. So one of you is the mole."

The corners of Macready's mouth turned down. "It isn't me," he said.

"No," I said, "it isn't. By all accounts the mole was turned by one of his agents, and you've never run agents in the field. But Jacobsen has. Check into it and I think you'll find that Kolia was one and

that the string of successes that have put him where he is date from that time too."

"Speculation with reason," Jacobsen sneered. "If that's what you call reason, I'll take nonsense every time. You can't prove a shred of that."

"No," I said, "but Kolia can, and what do you want to bet he won't fall all over himself doing just that once he realizes the hot spot he's in."

Jacobsen's eyes held mine for a long moment, then his hand went down into his pocket. I shot him twice before he could pull it out, the bullets catching him high in the chest and knocking him and the chair over together. As he fell the pipe flew from his fingers and clattered on the wall opposite.

Macready stood for a long time staring at the fallen body, his face ashen. Finally he found his voice. "That was unfortunate," he said. "We could have turned him again. Gotten him to work for us against them."

"I know," I said. I'd known too that it was his pipe he'd been reaching for, not a gun. But Golitsyn's options had been a lot less than he'd bargained for. I thought his betrayer's should be too.

## DETECTIVERSE

### *THE REAL MYSTERY*

*by LOLA STRONG JANES*

How can a person who's really quite nice  
Dream up some horribly deadly device,  
Guaranteed fully to give you a chill,  
Bringing you jarringly in on the kill,  
Keeping you page-turning ever so fast,  
Adding suspense and solution at last?  
What kind of madness allows them to think  
Violent crimes and commit them—to ink?  
I'd be so happy if only I knew  
How those nice writers can do what they do!

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a **NEW** short story by

**CHRISTIANNA BRAND**

*Her eyes were open now, blue eyes like Polly's eyes, but blue eyes glazed and agonized, staring up at the snowflakes falling all around her.*

*He said, "I'll try to get you out. I'll get you to a hospital."*

*She didn't answer him, she didn't hear. . .*

*A haunting story published here for the first time in the United States. It will appear this coming fall in an eagerly awaited collection of Christianna Brand stories, Buffet for Unwelcome Guests, published by Southern Illinois University Press . . .*

## **AND SHE SMILED AT ME**

**by CHRISTIANNA BRAND**

**I**t was as though the sound would never cease—the clash of metal, the shattering of glass, the squeal of skidding tires, and the terrible screaming. But it ended; and in all the world, it seemed to him—lying out where the force of the impact had flung him, on the verge of the snowy road—there was nothing now but silence.

Nothing but silence. No cries of alarm, no thudding footsteps dashing to bring assistance, no acceleration of motor engines hastening to the scene of all that violent uproar. Miles from anywhere, he thought; I'm miles from anywhere. He knew the road. Nothing will pass this way for heaven knows how long. I'm totally alone.

Well—except for one other. He dragged himself up and lurched over to the tangled mass which just a few minutes ago had been a gay little blue Mini car, now crushed, head on, close against the nose of his own great shining juggernaut of a Daimler.

The girl was dead. Or dying. She's dying, he thought, she couldn't

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survive this, she must be dying. Her eyes were closed. The pale face that a moment ago must have been so pretty and sweet now was hideously streaked with wounds, upturned to the falling snow. Blonde hair tumbled about her shoulders, her body half hidden in tangled wreckage, arms and legs unnaturally angled. She was faintly, faintly moaning. She's dying, he thought, and I'm here alone with her.

And there came another thought that made his heart lurch within him. Just for a moment, she looked like his own precious Polly!

He went back to the Daimler. Except for the battered front radiator and splintered windscreen, it was relatively unharmed, and when he tried the accelerator it shook and juddered a bit but, miraculously, sparked into life. With infinite care so as not too much to disturb the wreckage of the Mini, he tested it, slowly backing away—and was free. If I could get her out, then, and drive her to civilization, find help, get her to hospital—

And arrive there, reeking of alcohol!—at half past four in the afternoon. Send the police scurrying to the scene of the accident, giveaway tire-marks and all!

He got out of his car again, stood taking in deep breaths of the freezing air to clear his lungs of the brandy fumes—and saw how the snow fell, soft but thick, slowly, slowly obliterating the marks where, driving far too fast, he had rounded the bend, taking it wide, almost entirely on the wrong side of the road; had slithered and skidded, trying to correct his position, and so run full tilt into the little car. I must have been drunk, he thought. But no, no—a bit tight, yes, O.K., but he hadn't been drunk.

All the same, "a bit tight" had been enough. And here was a girl, dead or dying. Was he now to offer himself up to the police breathalyzer?—literally to offer himself, for if one thing was certain it was that when they got the first whiff of his breath, they'd clap the little tube into his mouth and tell him, please sir, to breathe out—breathe out very fully, please sir.

Barrister Breathalized . . . Well known Barrister Charged with Drunken Driving . . . Famous Barrister Found Guilty of Causing Death on the Highway . . . Marston Fenton, Q.C., Resigns from Further Practice of the Law . . . Marston Fenton Struck Off . . .

Could it come to that? Of course not, almost certainly not. But his huge reputation would suffer, that was a certainty. Only too possibly, work would fall away. And where would Miss Polly Fenton be then?—Daddy's darling, Daddy's pet. There was no Mrs. Fenton any more.

She had gone.—“You are absolutely in love with that child, Marston! It’s disgusting—in love with your own daughter!”

“You’re jealous,” he had said, “of your own daughter!” But she had gone, and perhaps in a way, though God knew in all utter innocence, what she had said was true: he loved his girl too much. Well—a man had to have some light in his life, a life spent in the sordid commercial squabbles of financial practice, and this little creature of his was all sunshine, a golden sparkle in his arid and empty heart.

But the sparkle must shimmer in its own setting, the lovely home her mother had left, the expensive finishing school, the riding, the new bright-yellow sporty little car. If he had to give up the law, if his busy practice fell away—The money had rolled in but it rolled out almost as fast. And why not—with years still ahead at the top of his profession, and the fees that go with that sort of situation?

Only—with that sort of situation must go, hand in hand, an unbesmirched reputation, respectability. Some might get away with it—but he knew himself not too deeply loved among the lesser lawyers that fed the work to him: and he might not. Famous Company Lawyer on Drunken Driving Charge. And a girl dead.

A girl dead—or dying. Hand clenched against his aching head, he staggered back to the Mini. She lay very still, trapped there, moaning those pitiful little moans. But her eyes were open now, blue eyes like Polly’s eyes, but blue eyes glazed and agonized, staring up at the snowflakes falling all around her. He said, “I’ll try to get you out. I’ll get you to hospital.”

She didn’t answer him, she didn’t hear.

Get her to hospital. O.K. But—what for?

To die in just that much more comfort? To die, hardly conscious if conscious at all, in a warm bed rather than out here in the grim embrace of a tangle of twisted metal, under the snow?

For so small a difference as this, was his Polly to suffer the deprivation for the rest of her life of so much that she loved, so much that she needed, that belonged to her? When it could all be prevented?

For the snow that fell so soft and cold on the wounded face was falling upon the road also, was covering over the tracks on the road, burying them deep. In a little while it would lie so heavily that, with advancing night, it would be impossible to see how widely his car had taken the fatal bend. And the air that froze her motionless body, trapped there in its metal shroud, was clearing his lungs of

the telltale fumes of alcohol. If I'd passed out, he thought, if I'd lain there at the side of the road and known nothing, the snow would have gone on falling, covering the tracks, the air would have gone on clearing away the smell of the brandy, and—

And she would have died. But she was going to die anyway.

Try to revive her? The thought of the brandy reminded him of the flask in the glove compartment of the car—well, the flask half full. He had been so exhausted leaving his chambers after the intense concentration of a day-long consultation that he'd stopped by the roadside and taken a nip—and taken far too large a nip, he acknowledged that now, taken a hell of a great nip, in fact, as of late had become something of a habit. One didn't become Famous Company Lawyer without its taking a toll of one's strength, both mental and physical. The strain of keeping up his record of success was enormous. So—the flask. Stop in a lay-by for a nip. And on this occasion he had stopped later on for a second. Driving home into the countryside each day had become an extra effort, but Polly was waiting for him there—he couldn't not go home.

His mind, meandering, fought its way up out of shock. If he could get rid of the smell on his breath—After all, who could ever say he had been drunk? Everyone would swear he'd been sober enough when he left to drive home—at four o'clock in the afternoon, for heaven's sake! A quick cup of horrible office tea and he'd been gone.

O.K., but the police would find the flask, put two and two together. How long did it take to get rid of every trace of the smell?

He dragged his mind back to the girl; got the flask, went back to her, lifted up the lolling head with its steel of long blonde hair. "Try to drink a little of this," he said and put the flask to her poor, torn mouth. But she could not. The fluid fell in and dribbled out. She was past swallowing. Her eyelids fluttered over the glazing eyes.

Well, I tried, he thought. But now the police would know that he had not in fact been unconscious, that he had been enough aware to have tried to revive her. And with the effort of thought, real, practical thought returned. He went back once again to the Daimler, edged it forward until crushed bumper touched against crushed bumper, each curve and dent fitting curve and dent, and rammed into the front bonnet of the little blue Mini. Shuffling back, as though hardly in control of his legs so that he confused earlier footprints, he found the spot where he had lain on the verge of the road, already half obliterated by the snow. From there, with a dragging motion, he worked his way to the Mini, stood, and went through the motions

of lifting her and holding his flask to her lips. I'll let myself fall back into the snow, he thought, and lie there as though I'd toppled back unconscious again, while I tried to help her. But first he took one long draught from the brandy flask. Shocked . . . So shaky . . . Trying to revive her . . . Trying to revive myself, trying to keep out the cold . . .

There was no one to say that he hadn't, when last seen, been entirely sober. No one to say how much had been in the brandy flask. No one to say that he'd taken more than that one fortifying draught before he'd fallen and lain in the snow, unconscious beside the little car. I'll catch my bloody death of pneumonia, he thought, lying there, having to pray that they won't come too soon. And from somewhere deep inside himself a voice answered, And serve you right! But it wasn't for himself—it was for Polly. The last moments of a dying girl were for living Polly with all her bright future before her.

The blue eyes opened wide. The girl said, very clearly: "No future." And she smiled. If you could call that a smile.

The shock was—horrible. For a moment it almost sounded as though she answered his thought, had meant—no future for Polly. But, no, she was speaking about herself, of course she was. And she was right, for he saw that she was dead.

When they found him at last, he had got back into his own car. The longer they took, the better; but there'd been no point, really, in his going on lying there, courting death, by the side of the road. He'd come to again, he explained, had been trying to start up the car and go for help, but kept passing out again . . .

And the days went by and the weeks; and the months went by and except in such hearts as had loved her, she was dead and forgotten. But in those hearts, and it seemed there were many of them, she lived on; and in his own heart—and in Polly's. "I'm always thinking about her, Daddy. It seems so awful that here I am alive, and she's dead. I mean, the same age as me and you say she was rather like me, blue eyes and fair hair and all that."

"Oh, darling," he said, shuddering, "don't keep reminding me!"

"Well, it wasn't your fault, of course, everybody knows that. In fact, if it was anyone's I suppose it was her own."

That had been almost the worst part—having to shift the blame on to her. But he must account for the position of his own car, head-

on, crushed up against hers on her side of the road. "I daresay she was blinded by the snow," he'd told the Coroner's court. "I seem to have a memory of the windscreen all furred up with white. Probably her windscreen-wipers couldn't deal with it. I swerved over, trying to dodge her, but she swerved back to her own side at the same time—" Everyone had recognized that he'd been trying to save her—lying to try to save her memory, poor pitiful dead girl. He had learned the lesson in other courts. He was adept at pretending to be pretending to be acting. "Well, never mind, just skip it, Polly—try to let me forget."

"Yes, I'm sorry—I know it upsets you. Only it's a year tomorrow that it happened. Would you mind if I put some flowers where she died?" The parents had erected a small memorial stone by the side of the road.

He fought down the unworthy thought that that might look rather well. Though guiltless, of course, he had in fact been the cause of her death, and his daughter's making this gesture would set yet another seal upon his year-long demonstration of gentlemanly regret. "Yes, how lovely, darling! You do that." He considered again. "If you leave it to fairly late, I might even meet you there on my way home."

"That would make it just about the time she died," she said.

By coincidence it was snowing again. But he had no flask this time—the day of flasks was over. And he nowadays drove very carefully, and most carefully of all as he came to the bridge and that bend in the road.

He glanced at the clock on his dashboard. Polly would be there now—the very hour, she had said, at which the poor girl had died. He would get out and stand with her while she placed her flowers at the foot of the stone; make some small reverential obeisance of his own.

And she was there . . .

Lying half in, half out of the tangled mass of wreckage—not a little blue Mini this time, but a bright-yellow sports car—the girl lay caught, crushed, clutched fast in the grip of tangled metal, with her wounded face upturned to the falling snow. Blue eyes open and glazing, long blonde hair. For a split second his heart turned over with the wild hope: it's that other girl!

But it was not the other girl, that girl whose dying moments he had sacrificed to all the bright future of his living Polly. "No future,"

that girl had said. No future, she had meant, speaking not of her own but of all the bright future of his Polly. And she had smiled—if you could call it a smile.

A head-on collision—with no other car. Here at the very spot where he had killed the girl, had worked out coldly and clearly the plan that would deny her the last rights of the dying, had cheated a dying girl of any last moment of comfort—for his Polly's sake. No other car had butted, head-first, into the yellow sports car. No sign on the road, no skid marks, no tracks in the snow—no suggestion whatsoever that for many hours past any other presence had been here. A head-on collision—with absolute nothingness.

She opened her blue eyes wide. She said clearly: "Daddy? It was her, the girl, in her little blue Mini." And her dying eyes closed and she said, very softly: "She sort of—smiled at me."

"Q"

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a **NEW Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by**

**EDWARD D. HOCH**

*The May 1973 issue of EQMM featured a Nick Velvet story by Edward D. Hoch titled "The Theft of the Circus Poster." Up to that time, Mr. Hoch had been a regular contributor to the magazine. In the ten intervening years there has been a story by him in each and every issue—a record worthy of the Guinness Book of Records!*

*How does he keep up the pace and the quality? We don't know. We do know that readers keep begging for more of his stories about Captain Leopold, Double-C man Jeffery Rand, Nick Velvet, Simon Ark, Sir Gideon Parrot, and Dr. Sam Hawthorne. Where does he get his ideas? Asked that, he replies, "I read a lot and see things in newspapers, books, and magazines, in movies and on TV—an unusual idea will start a train of thought that leads to a story. Sometimes an editor or friend will present me with a challenging idea.*

*"It was Fred Dannay's suggestion that Nick Velvet steal tickets for a Broadway play that had been closed for two months ["The Theft of the Wicked Tickets," EQMM, 9/69] and an entire baseball team ["The Theft of the Meager Beavers," 12/69]. Francis M. Nevins, Jr. suggested I try a dying-message story in the "locked room" of a revolving door ["The Witch of Park Avenue," 8/82] and also another idea I've developed into a story not yet scheduled for publication in EQMM. And occasionally—not often—an incident in my past suggests a story, but for some reason this has happened only many years after the fact."*

*A further bit of inside information about the writing practices of the prolific Mr. Hoch. Your editor has had the amazing experience of witnessing him first hand (pun intended) at work at his typewriter. He types all his own manuscripts—with one finger! As Jack Paar was wont to say on the old Tonight Show, "I kid you not . . ."*

# THE PROBLEM OF THE HUNTING LODGE

by **EDWARD D. HOCH**

“I think I promised to tell you about the time my folks visited me here in Northmont,” Dr. Sam Hawthorne said as he poured the brandy.

“It was the start of deer-hunting season in the autumn of 1930, and I was thirty-four years old. I’d been practicing in town for eight years and it had become more of a home to me than the Midwestern city where I grew up. That was a difficult thing to explain to my father . . .”

We’d always done a great deal of hunting in my youth [Dr. Sam continued], and I suppose it was only natural that my father, Harry Hawthorne, who had retired from the profitable dry-goods store that was his life for nearly forty years, would decide to visit his only son in New England and get in a bit of deer hunting at the same time. My mother came with him, of course, and I was happy to see them both. I hadn’t made a trip back home since the previous Christmas, just after Sheriff Lens’ marriage, and this was only the second time in my eight years here that they’d come to Northmont.

I met them at the train station and went to help Dad with their baggage.

“You’d think we were staying a month instead of five days,” he grumbled. “You know what your mother’s like when she travels.” Though it was white now, he’d kept most of his hair, and he still had the vigor of a much younger man. My mother, by contrast, had always been on the frail side.

I led them to my new Stutz Torpedo and listened to my father’s words of grudging approval. “The doctoring business must be pretty good these days for you to afford a car like this.”

“I got a good deal on it,” I explained, “from another doctor who needed the money.”

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"It's too bad about the car we gave you for a graduation present," my mother said, climbing in the front seat.

"It burnt up. I was lucky I wasn't in it," I said, shutting the passenger door and going around to the other side.

We stopped by the office first and I took them inside. "Mom, this is my nurse, April. As I've told you, she's a great help to me."

April had never met my parents and she fussed over them in her best manner. Sheriff Lens dropped by just as we were leaving and gave my father a vigorous handshake. "I'll tell you, Mr. Hawthorne, that son o' yours would make a fine sleuth. He's helped me out on more cases than I care to count."

"Oh?" My mother looked alarmed. "Do you have much crime here, Sheriff?"

"More than you'd think possible," he said with something like pride in his voice. "We needed the gumption of somebody like Doc here to deal with 'em. He's got a mind like that fella Einstein!"

"We'd better be going," I mumbled, embarrassed as always by the sheriff's praise.

"What're you goin' to do while you're here?" he asked my father.

"Oh, a little deer hunting, maybe."

"Good weather for it."

"There's a fellow lives near here that I've been corresponding with," my father said. "Ryder Sexton. I thought we'd drive over and see him one day."

"Oh, Sexton's a hunter, all right! You should see his collection o' weapons!"

"I'm anxious to. He's written me about them."

Sheriff Lens licked his lips. "I'll give you some advice. Go see Ryder Sexton right away—today or tomorrow. Maybe he'll invite you to hunt on his property. He's got some woods an' a pond that're the best deer-huntin' spots in the whole county. He's even got a little huntin' lodge built back on his land, near the pond. He uses *it* for duck huntin' too."

"Thanks for the tip," my father said. "Be seeing you, Sheriff."

I'd planned a quiet evening for them, but after the sheriff's advice Dad insisted that I phone Sexton after we'd had dinner at my apartment. I knew the man only slightly, though when I put my father on the line it was clear that they were excited at the prospect of a first meeting. The upshot of it was that I agreed to drive my parents over to Sexton's house the following morning.

"I have to see a patient at nine," I told them as I prepared the bed in my spare room, "but I'll be back here to pick you up around ten. Sexton's place is about a twenty-minute drive from here."

Ryder Sexton was the last of our county's old land barons, if the term could ever be used properly in this area of New England. He owned some three hundred acres of property. There were farms that large, of course, but Ryder Sexton was no farmer, not even the gentleman sort. He'd made his money in munitions during the war, and though he no longer had an interest in the Sexton Arms empire his name was still linked to it.

The following morning was crisp and unusually clear for mid-November. I drove along the rutted back roads, pointing out the farms and landmarks. "This fenced-in property is the beginning of the Sexton place," I said.

"It certainly is large," my mother remarked. "Harry, you always knew how to make friends with rich folks."

Father sputtered in mock protest. "I read a letter of his in the *American Rifleman* magazine and wrote him about it. I never knew if he was rich or poor, and I sure never connected him with Sexton Arms."

"He bought this place a few years ago after he sold the company," I explained. "He spends part of the year in Florida and in New York, but he's always up here during hunting season. Sheriff Lens told me about his collection of primitive weapons."

Ryder Sexton himself came to the door to greet us, wearing a fringed deerskin jacket and riding britches. He was a tall, imposing man with a ruddy complexion and steel-gray hair worn in a short military fashion. Seeing him with my father made me think somehow of a reunion of Army officers from the last war, though I knew that Sexton had been busy on the home front and my father's military service had been confined to the local draft board.

Sexton nodded a greeting to me, but he seemed genuinely pleased to meet my father. "I look forward to your letters, Harry. They're more sensible than most of the stuff in the daily papers. And this must be Doris," he said to my mother. "Welcome to Northmont, both of you. Come in, come in!"

I'd never met any of Sexton's family and I was surprised when a young woman appeared with an armload of fall flowers and was introduced as his wife. "There's supposed to be a frost tonight," she explained, "so I've been gathering up the last of them."

Her name was Rosemary, and I guessed her to be maybe thirty

years younger than her husband, who was pushing sixty. She was probably a second wife, and attractive, with a direct, friendly manner. I tried to remember if I'd seen her about town, but I didn't think I had—which wasn't surprising, since the Sextons were here only part of the year.

"How's the deer hunting in this area?" my father asked when we were settled down in the paneled living room before a large open fire. "I'd like to give it a try while I'm visiting."

"Fine right now," Ryder Sexton assured him. "Couldn't be better. In fact, I'm going out with a few people tomorrow morning, if you'd like to join us. We hunt here on the property, down by the pond. I have a bit over three hundred acres, with lots of woods. I even have a small hunting lodge down there."

"That's mighty generous of you," Father answered with a smile, quickly accepting the offer.

"You too, Sam," Sexton added, including me as an afterthought. "Your mother can come and stay here at the house with Rosemary while we're out."

I mumbled something about appointments with my patients, but I knew I'd be able to arrange it. The idea of hunting with my father again, as we'd done so many years ago, overcame my momentary distaste for slaughtering deer. "What time will you be starting?"

Sexton thought a moment. "Early. Be out here by seven if you can. My neighbor, Jim Freeman, is joining us and Bill Tracy is coming out from town. Maybe I'll invite Sheriff Lens too. That'll make six of us in all."

Bill Tracy was a real-estate man who'd had some dealings with Sexton, and Jim Freeman was a successful farmer. I knew them both quite well, and had recently doctored Freeman's daughter for the usual childhood illnesses.

"We'll be here," Father assured Sexton. "Now what about your collection? I'm itching to see it."

Ryder Sexton chuckled and led us to an adjoining den where two walls were almost covered by tall glass-doored cabinets. Inside were a number of items, mainly made of wood, and our host gave us a quick description of each. "I've been collecting primitive weapons for years, and though we're here for only a portion of the year I decided this was the best place to house my collection. This first is a cord sling. One of those stones was placed in that pouch and the thing was whirled over your head and released. That's how David

killed Goliath. This pellet-bow from India has the pouch fixed between its two strings."

"Unusual," my father murmured. "I never saw one of those."

"These are throwing-sticks used by Australian aborigines. And of course you're familiar with the boomerang. Here's a collection of darts, javelins, and throwing spears. Jim Freeman next door will tell you how he dropped darts from airplanes during the war.

"Notice this wooden spear-thrower from the South Pacific. The spear fits into this socket and the thrower acts like an extra joint in the arm. Eskimos use something similar for harpoons. Here we have some Patagonian bolas, with three balls connected by thongs to a common center. They're generally used to entangle the prey."

I looked ahead at the next cabinet. "These swords seem more recent."

"They're ceremonial swords from the western Pacific islands," Sexton explained. "Notice this club. It's been edged with sharks' teeth to make it quite deadly. I sometimes use it to dispatch wounded deer. And here are some shields of coconut fiber from the same area." He might have gone on for another half hour if his wife hadn't interrupted to say, "Here's Jennifer!" Out the window I saw a young woman in her twenties walking a bicycle into the side yard. "Come on," Mrs. Sexton urged us, "I want you to meet my sister."

We trooped outside and she introduced us as her sister stowed the bike away in an unused henhouse. "Jennifer, this is Harry and Doris Hawthorne—and their son Dr. Sam Hawthorne, from town. They're visiting him this week, and Harry is a friend of Ryder's."

Jennifer seemed delighted to meet us. "Rosemary insisted I come and stay with them for a month, but I really like to see people around. After living in New York, I've become too much of a city girl, I guess."

"You seem quite at home with that bicycle," I remarked.

"Ryder says I mustn't take it on the trails back in the woods. He's afraid a hunter might mistake me for a deer." She pouted prettily. "Would you mistake me for a deer?" she asked me.

"I might," I conceded.

Our departure was delayed by the arrival of Jim Freeman from the neighboring farm. He'd walked over through the fields, a big lumbering man who'd always reminded me more of a wrestler than a farmer. "Weather forecast says we might get a little snow tonight,"

he told Ryder Sexton. "You gonna run the hose out to your huntin' lodge to keep your water from freezin'?"

Sexton nodded. "I suppose I should." He turned to my father and explained. "I have a tank of water in the lodge for necessities. It comes in handy for brewing coffee or mixing drinks, doing dishes or even flushing the outhouse."

"All the comforts of home," my mother remarked drily. She'd never thought much of hunting, and I remembered how in my youth she'd badgered my father for taking me out to shoot pheasants on a Sunday afternoon.

Ryder Sexton kept a hundred yards of hose coiled around a drum out in back of the barn and he started dragging one end with him as we walked down to his lodge. "I'll show you where we'll be in the morning," he said. "I'll leave the water running slowly all night and then my tank won't freeze up."

He turned to his neighbor. "There'll be six of us in the morning, Jim. Harry and Sam are joining us, and I thought I'd invite Sheriff Lens too."

"Fine."

We strode between two oaks and over the crest of a small hill. Below us, some fifty yards away, was a crude shelter made of rough boards with a roof of tree branches. It stood near the edge of a pond, still and quiet in the morning sun. Sexton gave a yank on the hose and pulled it down the hill, trailing it after him through the short grass. It wasn't much thicker than a garden hose but many farmers bought it in hundred-yard lengths for irrigation purposes.

The hunting lodge was larger inside than it had first appeared, with room for all of us to crowd in easily. Rosemary Sexton and her sister Jennifer had followed along, and with Sexton, Freeman, my folks and me, that made seven of us. The ceiling was low above our heads, but I could stand and walk without stooping. There were firepots, crude chairs, and a table, together with gun racks and even a small icebox where food and beverages could be kept. A metal tank full of water was attached to a shelf along one wall. Sexton ran the end of his hose into it.

"It holds thirty gallons—almost the size of a barrel," he explained, directing his words to my father. "The hose goes in the top. I'll turn the water back on at the pump, just enough to keep it flowing all night. And I'll open this faucet a dribble. The drain empties into the pond."

"There are quite a few holes in your wall," I commented.

"Those are gun holes, Sam," my father was quick to explain. "Right, Ryder?"

"Sure are! Tomorrow morning a couple of us will wait here while the rest of you drive the deer toward us. Then we'll fire through these gun ports and catch 'em as they cross that open space."

"Sounds good to me," Father said enthusiastically.

"It would," my mother muttered.

Jennifer gave a little groan. "Looks as if you and I are going to be cooking venison, Rosemary."

Sexton's wife snorted. "They haven't killed them yet. My money's on the deer."

We strolled back up the hill and watched while Sexton turned on the pump and regulated the flow of water through the hose to the crudely built hunting lodge. Then Freeman headed back across the field toward his farm and I got my folks back to the car. "Seven o'clock," Ryder Sexton called out after us.

That night over dinner my mother admitted that Ryder and his wife seemed nice enough. "For deer hunters," she added.

Father laughed. "I don't think the wife hunts, Doris. Don't tar her with the same brush as him."

"I have to stop by the office," I told them, "in case April left me any messages."

"You go ahead." Mother started gathering up the dishes. "Your father and I better get to bed early anyhow if we're supposed to be up with the chickens."

"Before the chickens, Doris," he corrected her.

I drove down to the office and found only one message of any importance. A farm injury had hospitalized one of my patients, and I drove over to Pilgrim Memorial to see how he was doing. As I was leaving, I ran into Bill Tracy. Bill was always well dressed, with a stiffly starched collar that made him look more like the town banker than a real-estate man. I'd never known him to hunt before, and I had to mention it to him.

"My hunting's no stranger than yours, Sam. How come you're going out there?" he countered.

"My folks are visiting and Dad's corresponded with Sexton. He invited us both to come along. We were out there looking around this morning. It's quite a place."

"Is his sister-in-law still there?"

"Jennifer? Yes, she was around. Lovely girl."

Bill Tracy slid a finger beneath his starched collar. "I think I saw her over at the Freeman place one afternoon last week as I was driving by. I couldn't be sure, though. It might have been Mrs. Sexton. They look a little alike."

"Not close up. Maybe it was one of Freeman's daughters."

"Naw, I recognized that bike Jennifer rides, parked around the side of the house." He winked at me. "And she told me she was bored with country life."

"She implied that much today," I admitted.

"Well, I'll see you in the morning, Sam. Keep your eyes open and you might spot something more interesting than deer."

I was still thinking about that when I got home and found my mother sitting up by the window with a cup of hot chocolate. "I need to relax before I can sleep," she told me. "Not your father, though. He's already snoring in there."

"How's his health, Mom?" I asked, settling down on the sofa by her side.

"Good enough for his age, I suppose. He saw his doctor about some heart palpitations last month. Keep an eye on him during the hunt tomorrow, Sam."

"Of course."

She sipped her hot chocolate and sighed. "I've never liked him hunting. You neither!"

"I haven't hunted in nearly twenty years—not since the last time with him. I'm going along tomorrow because I think he wants me to."

He likes to think you're still his boy, Sam."

"I guess I always will be. And yours too."

"No, no." She shook her head. "You're a man now. You should be married, with a family."

"I know, Mom."

"When you wrote me about that wedding last Christmas I thought for a minute it was yours."

"Sheriff Lens got married. And he's a lot older than me."

"Don't let it slip by you, Sam. Don't spend all your time treating ill people and doing this detective work of yours and wake up one morning to find you're an old man without anyone to love you."

"Hey," I laughed, "this is pretty serious stuff! Come on, it's off to bed for both of us. I've got the alarm clock set for five-thirty."

"All right," she agreed, and gave me a kiss on the cheek. "But think about what I said."

I lay awake for a time after that, listening to the snoring from the next room and wondering if my mother had anyone to love her.

The morning alarm wakened me from a deep dreamless sleep, and I peered out the window to see a thin coating of snow over the landscape. It was still dark as I heard my folks moving to and from the bathroom and getting dressed.

"Good morning," I called out to them, "we got about a half inch of snow overnight!"

"Good deer-tracking weather!" my father called back.

"Sure is! I'll get us some breakfast."

The road to the Sexton place was virtually deserted as we drove out an hour later. Only a few tire tracks had broken the white mantle of snow, and when we turned into the Sexton driveway I realized that one set of these belonged to Sheriff Lens, who'd arrived ahead of us. The sun was up now, and the sheriff stood by his car with a deer rifle at his side, chatting with Sexton and Jim Freeman.

"Isn't this snow-cover great?" Ryder Sexton exclaimed as he greeted us. "The deer won't have a chance!"

Jennifer came out of the house with wrapped sandwiches for everyone and Rosemary Sexton hurried out behind her to welcome my mother. "Come in the house where you'll be warm—and safe."

Another car pulled into the driveway behind my Stutz and Bill Tracy climbed out, carrying his rifle in a fancy leather case. "Good morning, all!"

I introduced him to my parents and he accepted a sandwich from Jennifer. Then Sexton began issuing orders. "You'll spread out in a half circle with the pond and the hunting lodge as the focus. Stay clear of each other so's you can cover a wider area, then start converging toward the lodge, driving the deer that way. Sam, how about if you stay in the lodge with me?"

I remembered my promise of the previous night to keep an eye on Dad. "I think I'd rather be out in the field if it's all the same with you."

Ryder Sexton shrugged. "Sure. I'll stay down there alone and pick 'em off like in a shooting gallery. Five of you can probably cover a larger circle anyhow."

We tramped back through the shallow snow to the pump house, where he turned off the water he'd had running since the previous night. "Jim, stay here till I disconnect the hose and then reel it in for me. I don't want no one tripping over it and spoiling a good shot."

While Freeman stayed, the rest of us headed for the lodge. Jennifer, wearing only a thin jacket over a sweater and men's work-pants, was in the lead with Sexton. "Are you hunting too?" I called out to her.

"I wish they'd let me!"

I fell in step with Sheriff Lens while Bill Tracy brought up the rear with my father. "How's the wife, Sheriff?"

"Good, Doc. I'd better bring home some meat for the table, though, or she'll never forgive me for takin' a whole day off!"

"Damn," Sexton grumbled from up ahead. "I'd forget my head if it wasn't screwed on!" He muttered some instructions to Jennifer and then paused at the top of the rise overlooking the hunting lodge. "And, Jennifer, on your way back tell Jim to start winding up the hose when I give the signal."

"Sure," she said, and started back.

"I like your boots," I told Sexton, admiring the sleek glisten of the new leather.

"Bought 'em in New York. Look at the tread on them!" He showed me the soles, then for the first time he noticed my rifle, an old Winchester I'd had for years. "If you don't mind my saying so, Sam, that's not much of a weapon for deer. I've got an extra up at the house if you'd like it."

"No, no, this is fine for me. I leave the fancy shooting to my father."

"All right, if you say so." He turned to Dad and Bill Tracy and the sheriff. "Look, this little rise pretty much protects the house from stray shots, but even so let's try to keep from firing in that direction. A rifle slug carries a long way and I don't want any broken windows. Or dead wives." He chuckled a bit at the last, to show it was meant as a joke. Then we waited at the top of the rise as he walked down across the virgin snow toward the lodge. He carried the rifle in his right hand and one of Jennifer's sandwiches in his left, stepping over the hose to enter the doorway.

I could see him through some of the gun ports in the lodge walls, pulling the hose from his water tank and dropping it in the doorway. "Pull it in!" he shouted, and I relayed the signal back to Jim Freeman at the pump house. Freeman started turning the drum, collecting the hose as it snaked back through the snow.

When Sexton saw that Freeman had rejoined us, he called out, "Start your circle now. Watch for deer tracks, and drive 'em this way. I'll be ready, and I'll have the coffee brewing too!"

We headed off across the fields, with Tracy and Freeman moving

out to the east while the sheriff, Dad, and I fanned out in the opposite direction. I managed to keep my father in sight, and once when he spotted deer tracks I ran over to check them out.

"It's a deer, all right," I agreed. "A big one too, from the looks of it." I trudged along at his side, not bothering to resume my former position. We were on the trail together now, as we'd been so many times in my youth.

He must have been thinking the same thing. "Brings back the old days, don't it?"

"Sure does, Dad."

"Your mother tell you about my heart?"

"She said you've had a few problems. Are you taking some pills?"

"Sure, sure. I'll live to be a hundred. After all, my son's a doctor, isn't he?"

"I only wish I lived nearer to you. What would you think of moving east?"

"To New England? Not a chance! We're Midwesterners. You were too, once."

"I know. But it would be hard to go back now."

"I don't know. Do you think your life is any better here?"

"I enjoy it."

"You like men like Sexton for patients? Rich men?"

"He's not my patient. He's *your* friend, remember."

"Your mother thinks his wife's not happy."

"Why's that?" I asked, guiding our route through the woods so we stayed in line with the deer we were tracking.

"Oh, Rosemary Sexton made some remark about hunting, and about how her whole life seems to be lived around her husband's whims. Doris thought she sounded a little bitter."

"Most women in Northmont would love to trade places with her."

We came upon fresh deer droppings in the snow and my father signaled for silence. "Quiet now," he whispered. "We're not far behind him."

We came out of the woods, moving around a clump of underbrush, and I saw Sheriff Lens off to the left. He waved and pointed straight ahead, at something we couldn't see. Then suddenly a deer broke from cover about two hundred yards ahead of us, running in the general direction of Sexton's lodge.

"Look at the rack on him!" my father breathed. "Might be a twelve-pointer!"

The deer started to turn toward us and Sheriff Lens raised his

rifle for a quick shot. The range was too far for any accuracy, and he must have realized that. He lowered his weapon as the deer changed direction again.

"The wind is from our direction," my father said. "He probably scents us."

"If Tracy and Freeman are in position we've got him trapped. The only way out is past the lodge where Sexton will nail him."

We hurried now, breaking into a trot to keep up with the fleeing animal. Presently the pond came into view, and then the lodge. I could see Freeman just coming over the hill on the other side, and after a moment Bill Tracy appeared too, back toward the house. Both men had seen the deer and had their weapons raised.

"Why don't they shoot?" Sheriff Lens wanted to know, trotting over to join us.

"The buck is so near the lodge Sexton can kill it with an easy shot," my father said. He had his own rifle ready, but the deer kept running, straight as an arrow. It scooted across the clearing, passing not twenty yards from the lodge.

There was no shot.

Then, before anyone realized what was happening, the big buck ran through the shallow water at the edge of the pond, outflanking Freeman. The farmer turned, dropped to one knee, and fired a quick shot. We saw the spout of water where the bullet hit beyond and behind the fleeing deer's path, then it was gone, into the woods beyond the pond.

"What in hell happened?" Tracy yelled, coming down to join us.

Freeman hurried over too. "Why didn't Sexton get him?"

"I don't know," my father replied, and I didn't know either. We all just stood there, staring down at the hunting lodge. There were still only Ryder Sexton's footprints leading into it, but a little column of smoke showed that he'd started the fire for coffee.

My father started down across the snow, following the deer's trail till it passed the lodge, then dropping off to enter through the doorway.

He reappeared almost at once, calling up to me. "Come quick, Sam, something's happened! I think he's been murdered!"

I warned the others to stay where they were and went to have a look.

Ryder Sexton was sprawled in the center of the lodge, near the table. He lay on his face and the back of his head was bloody. Nearby

was one of the clubs edged with sharks' teeth, from his collection of primitive weapons.

"He's dead, all right," I confirmed. "That thing probably killed him instantly."

"But who, Sam?" my father asked.

I walked to the doorway and called to Sheriff Lens. "I need you, Sheriff, but walk carefully. We don't want to disturb any footprints."

"There aren't any footprints, Doc—except Ryder's own. I been all around the cabin. And the outhouse is empty."

I looked out on the pond side and confirmed what he'd said. The lodge was near the water here, but there were still some ten yards of unmarked snow separating them. Despite my warning, Tracy and Freeman had followed us down, but it didn't really matter. Ryder Sexton's were the only tracks into the lodge, and there were no tracks going out. Whoever had killed him with that primitive club had done it by remote control.

"Someone will have to tell his wife," Jim Freeman said, staring down at the body.

"Who could have done it?" Tracy asked. "A tramp passing through the woods?"

"A tramp who didn't leave footprints?" I asked. "All we saw were the tracks of the deer. Did any of you see footprints?"

They all shook their heads. None of them had. I went outside and knelt in the snow, examining the tracks that Sexton had left. Then we all went back up to the house together, where Sheriff Lens broke the news while we stood grimly by. Rosemary Sexton simply stared at us, uncomprehending. "*Dead?* What do you mean *dead?*"

"We heard a shot," Jennifer said. "Was it a hunting accident?"

"He was killed by a blow on the head," I said. "We don't know who did it."

Rosemary Sexton collapsed.

When Jennifer and Jim Freeman helped carry her to her room, I got my bag from the car and gave her a mild sedative. Sheriff Lens was already on the telephone, instructing the operator to ring his deputies and have an ambulance sent out for the body.

I came back into the living room and went over to my mother, who was sitting white-faced in a chair. "What happened, Sam?" she asked me.

"I'm trying to find out," I replied. "Tell me, were either of the women out of the house while we were gone? Mrs. Sexton or Jennifer?"

"No," she answered, then immediately corrected herself. "At least I don't think they were. Rosemary was baking a cake for later and she was in the kitchen part of the time. Jennifer was upstairs for about ten minutes. I suppose either of them could have been out without my realizing it."

I squeezed her hand and went upstairs. Jennifer and Freeman were still with Rosemary. I found another bedroom at the back of the house that faced in the direction of the hunting lodge, but a big red barn stood between the house and the lodge, blocking my view of it.

"Trying to figure out how it was done?" a voice behind me asked. It was Jim Freeman.

"I know it seems impossible, but he is dead. I had a nice theory that the club might have been fired from here, like some sort of mortar shell."

Freeman came over to the window. "This is Jennifer's room. Do you think she did it?"

"I have no idea. I was just checking the view."

Freeman nodded. "During the war I was with the Air Corps in France. They were actually dropping darts, called *fléchettes*, out of planes onto enemy soldiers."

"That's what I mean. Darts can be dropped from planes, people can be stabbed with arrows. Perhaps clubs can be fired from mortars."

"Not too likely, though," Freeman said.

"No," I admitted, "especially since the roof of the lodge has no large openings in it." I thought of something else. "Have Mrs. Sexton or her sister ever visited your place?"

"Why do you ask?"

"It would be natural, since you're neighbors. Bill Tracy told me he thought he saw one of them over there last week."

Freeman snorted. "Bill Tracy's a gossipy old woman. Sure, Jennifer took a ride over one day. Why not? As you say, we're neighbors."

"But Rosemary Sexton has never been to your place?"

"Can't say never. She may have come with Ryder one evening. But she never came alone, if that's what you're driving at. You think I killed him to get at his wife?"

"I don't think anything right now, Jim. I'm just asking questions."

"Well, ask some others." He turned and walked from the room.

I went back downstairs and found Sheriff Lens conferring with two deputies who'd just arrived. "They're gonna take some flashbulb

photographs of the lodge and then remove the body. Is that okay, Doc?"

"Sure. You're in charge."

We walked back through the woods to the hunting lodge with the deputies. The snow was starting to melt in places, but Ryder Sexton's single set of footprints was still clearly visible. "You know, Doc," Sheriff Lens began slowly, "I figure there are just three ways it coulda been done."

I was used to this by now. But Sheriff Lens was generally triumphant when he offered me a possible solution, and there was no triumph in his voice today. "What are those, Sheriff?" I asked.

"The club was thrown or catapulted across the snow somehow."

"He was inside the lodge when he was killed," I pointed out. "Even if we accept the theory that he stuck his head out at the moment the club was thrown and then fell back inside, the club still would have fallen outside in the snow. Besides, those sharks' teeth are what did the damage. A club hurled through the air wouldn't have hit him at that angle with enough force to kill him."

"You thought on that already."

"Yes," I conceded.

"Okay, possibility number two. The murderer walked across the snow in Sexton's footprints, then walked out backward the same way."

I shook my head reluctantly. "His new boots had very distinctive treads. I examined those prints and the treadmarks haven't been blurred or obscured at all. Only Sexton walked across that snow, Sheriff, and he did it only once."

Sheriff Lens took a deep breath. "Well then, Doc, that only leaves my third possibility. Sexton was killed by the first person to enter the lodge, before the rest of us reached it."

"The first person to enter was my father."

"I know," Sheriff Lens said.

We said no more about it then, but walked across the stretch of slowly melting snow to the lodge where the deputies were finishing their work. The body was removed on a suitably covered stretcher, and one deputy moved his camera out to photograph the tracks in the snow before they disappeared.

"I found this on the floor," the other one said, holding out his hand to the sheriff.

"What is it? A feather?"

"Yeah."

Sheriff Lens grunted. "Looks old. Prob'ly left over from the last duck-hunting season."

"Looks more like a chicken feather to me," the deputy remarked. "Maybe someone used it for an arrow."

"Except he wasn't killed with an arrow," the sheriff grumbled. He stuck the feather in his pocket.

When the second deputy had left and we were alone, I said, "My father didn't kill Sexton."

"I know how you feel, Doc, and I'd be the same way. I'll admit he doesn't seem to have a motive—"

"He *couldn't* have killed him. Think about it, Sheriff. How did that club, the murder weapon, get in here? It was up at the house, in Sexton's glass case, and he didn't bring it down. We saw him enter the lodge carrying his rifle and a sandwich and nothing else. I've already shown that he couldn't have left again, even walking in his own tracks, without blurring them."

"Hell, Doc, the killer brought the club with him. That ain't hard to figure out."

"Of course, the killer brought the weapon in. And that means my father is innocent. He certainly didn't walk through the woods with me, and enter this lodge in front of us all, with that long shark-toothed club hidden under his coat. There's no way we wouldn't have noticed."

Sheriff Lens relaxed visibly. "Sure, Doc, you're right. He couldn't have done it."

"Besides, if Sexton was still alive when we approached the cabin he wouldn't have passed up that shot at the deer. He didn't fire at it because he was already dead."

"But where does that leave us?"

"I don't know," I admitted.

"Maybe a bird killed him! That would explain the feather! Or maybe someone with big wings strapped to their arms, soaring over the snow! How's that sound, Doc?"

"Not very likely," I told him gently. We left the lodge and started back toward the house.

"But I might have touched on something when I mentioned concealing the weapon under a coat," I said. "How did the killer approach with that club? Why didn't Ryder Sexton realize what was happening to him in time to fight back?"

"It was concealed somehow."

I snapped my fingers. "In a rifle carrier!"

"Like Bill Tracy has!"

We found Tracy just putting his rifle and case into the car. Sheriff Lens went back for the club and we tried to fit it into the carrier, but without success. With the rifle inside it wouldn't fit at all, and even without the rifle it made a peculiar bulge.

"I didn't even have the case out in the field!" Tracy insisted. "I just had the rifle! You guys are nuts if you think you're pinning this on me!"

"We're not trying to pin anything on you, Bill," I insisted.

He climbed into his car. "You know where to reach me if you got any more questions."

My mother came out of the house as Tracy drove away. "Sam, this whole business has upset your father terribly. I think we should leave as soon as possible."

"Of course," I agreed. "Just let me finish with the sheriff."

Sheriff Lens had gone into the house for a moment, but now he reappeared. "Except for the club none of his weapons are missing from their cases. But I have another idea, Sam. Suppose someone made one of them South American bolas with balls of ice? It coulda been hurled through the door of the lodge and wrapped itself around his neck, bashing his skull. Then the heat from the fire melted the ice balls."

"What about the cord, Sheriff? Did that melt too? And there were no puddles of melted ice on the scene. And what about the teeth marks from the club that really killed him? How do you account for them?" But the fire reminded me of the coffee, and that reminded me of something else. "The water tank!"

"Huh?"

"Come on, Sheriff! I'll explain on the way." He hurried after me as I bounded past the pump house and the barn and up the rise leading to the lodge. "Don't you see? The killer never crossed the snow because he was hidden in there all the time—since before the snow started! If that metal tank will hold thirty gallons of water it'll hold a small adult. He killed Sexton and then resumed his hiding place until it was safe to escape."

We were almost to the lodge now and Sheriff Lens had caught some of my enthusiasm. "Will he still be there?"

"Probably not, but the empty water tank is all the proof we need. The killer would have had to empty it down the drain in order to

fit inside, and he couldn't have refilled it later because the hose to the pump house was already disconnected and rolled up."

I'd rarely been so certain of anything in my life. Entering the lodge, I lifted the lid from the tank and plunged my hand inside.

It was filled with water, almost to the brim.

Sheriff Lens tried to console me. "Look, Doc, he could still have hidden in the tank, and just refilled it afterward."

"There was no hose."

"Maybe it's pond water."

"The snow between here and the pond was undisturbed," I reminded him. But just to satisfy us both, I let some of the water run from the tank. It was crystal-clear well water, not from any half stagnant pond.

Back at the house, I began feeling as dejected as when Sheriff Lens had raised the possibility of my father's involvement. There had to be an answer to the crime, but I knew well enough that the longer it went unsolved the less likely a solution became. One suspect, Tracy, had already gone home.

Rosemary Sexton seemed to have recovered somewhat and was back downstairs. She was pale and still a bit slow of speech, perhaps because of the sedative I'd given her. "Tell me how it happened," she said quietly.

"We don't know," I admitted. "He may have been killed by a tramp who'd been sleeping in the lodge."

She dismissed that with a wave of her hand. "Jim Freeman told me he was hit over the head with a club from his own weapons collection. That wouldn't have been a tramp."

My father came into the room in time to hear the end of this exchange. "You mean you think someone he knew killed him? I can't believe that."

"We don't know anything yet," I said wearily.

"He was my friend. I'll do anything I can to find his killer."

My mother intervened. "I think the best thing we can do is go back to town, Harry. Sam will take us."

She was right. It was time to go. But I still couldn't quite let go. "I want to see that weapons case," I said.

"I already checked it out, Doc," the sheriff said.

But I went to the den with its tall glass-doored cabinets. Jennifer followed me there and I asked, "Where did he keep the keys for these?"

"They're open. They were never locked."

I stood and stared at the empty spot in the cabinet where the shark-toothed club from the Pacific Islands had rested, remembering Ryder Sexton's words as he'd shown it to us. Someone had taken that club, crossed the unmarked snow with the wings of a bird, and slain the man.

I stared into the glass, seeing my reflection and Jennifer's next to me. "Let's walk outside," I said.

"The sun's gone in again. It's getting chilly," she said, opening the door.

I helped her down the back steps and we walked toward the out-buildings. "Maybe it'll snow again tonight."

"I feel so helpless," she said.

"We all do. It wasn't until I was looking at that glass case just now that I realized how helpless *I* was. I suddenly knew who killed Ryder Sexton, but I've got no proof that would convince a jury."

"That case told you?"

I nodded. "I remembered what Sexton said when he showed us that club. It was good for dispatching wounded deer in the field, he said. He used it for that, didn't he? And when he said this morning that he'd forgotten something, he was referring to the club. He asked someone to get it and bring it to him at the lodge."

She looked at me questioningly.

"He asked you, Jennifer. You were walking with him and I heard him mutter something to you. Then you went back to the house and got the club for him. The rest of us were off out in the fields and woods by that time, so we never saw you go back out there. The sight of you with that weapon didn't alarm Sexton because he'd asked you to bring it. He even turned his back to you and gave you a perfect target. With those sharks' teeth it didn't take too hard a blow to kill him."

"You're accusing me?"

"It could only have been you, Jennifer. I suppose you did it for the money, so your sister would inherit his fortune and it would be yours too."

"No."

"Yes, Jennifer. My mother told me you were upstairs for about ten minutes—that would have been long enough."

"How did I cross the snow? There were no tracks."

We'd reached the top of the rise and stood staring down at the

hunting lodge, peaceful in the autumnal setting. There was still enough of the snow remaining to show us Ryder Sexton's footprints.

"Oh, but there were tracks," I said. "There still are tracks, crying out at us to see them. But like Chesterton's postman they're so obvious they remain invisible. I refer, of course, to the track made by the irrigation hose that ran from the pump house to the lodge. Last night's half inch of snow fell on top of the hose, so when it was rolled up this morning the bare track of it remained across the field, running directly to the door of the lodge."

"You're mad! That hose is only about an inch and a half wide! Even walking on my toes, I couldn't follow its trail without leaving tracks!"

A cold wind was rising and I lifted the collar of my jacket. "You didn't walk on your toes, Jennifer," I said quietly. "You rode your bicycle."

If I had expected the fury of a trapped animal, there was none. She merely closed her eyes and swayed a bit. I put out a hand to steady her.

"You told me he didn't like you riding in the woods during hunting season," I continued, "so obviously it was something you'd done before. Following that narrow line left by the hose wouldn't have been difficult, and if you did edge off it once or twice, the hose itself could have made the marks when it was being dragged back. And of course you carried the bicycle from the henhouse to the pump house where the track began, so it left no new tracks in the barnyard. You probably held the club under your arm as you pedaled, and you followed the same track coming back. As long as you stayed in it there was no snow to record the tread of your bicycle tires. You left no clues, except for a single old chicken feather that must have stuck to the bicycle in the henhouse. That feather was all the confirmation I needed once I remembered you putting the bike away there yesterday."

"It wasn't the money." She spoke at last. "That had nothing to do with it. He was damned cruel to my sister. You must have noticed how unhappy she is. Sometimes he even beat her when he was drunk. She wouldn't leave him, so I did her the biggest favor I could. I killed him."

"Will you tell the sheriff that? —If you don't, I will."

We went back to the house and I left with Mom and Dad while Jennifer spoke to Sheriff Lens. On the way to town we caught sight

of that big twelve-point buck running at the edge of the woods. My father wanted me to stop so he could get a shot at it, but I kept on driving.

"That was the last time my parents visited me in Northmont," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded. "They said city life was a whole lot safer. Look here—the bottle's empty. But I'll have a fresh one next time you drop by. I'll tell you about the time Sheriff Lens finally solved a mystery all by himself."



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# DETECTIVERSE

## *FROZEN ASSETS*

*by WILLIAM F. SMITH*

With police in pursuit,  
The crooks fled with the loot,  
Heading speedily out of town.  
They searched for a spot  
To hide what they'd got  
Until all the heat had cooled down.  
The leader, Joe Blocker,  
Chose a frozen-food locker  
As the right place to secrete their stash,  
For in a sack (gunny)  
The load of hot money  
Would soon be a very cold cache.

"Q"

## *PERSUASIVE PALAVER*

*by WILLIAM F. SMITH*

Suppressing his fury,  
He cajoled the jury—  
That silver-tongued lawyer, McBurney—  
With a plea of defense  
That had such eloquence  
They convicted the district attorney.

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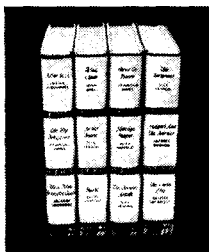
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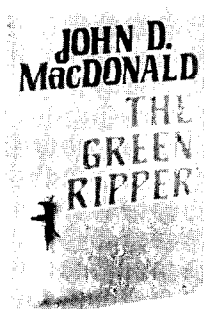
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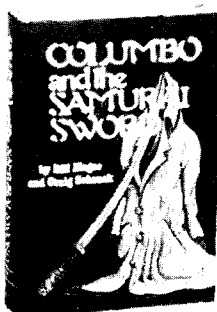
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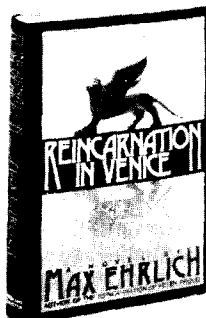
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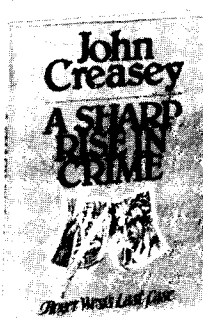
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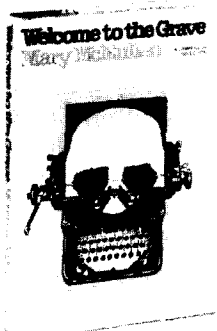
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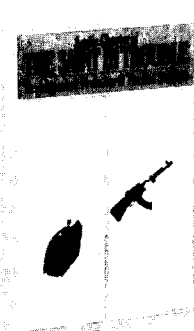
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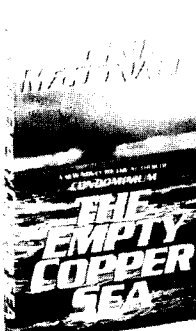
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